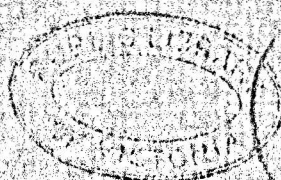


# THE OPERATIONS IN EGYPT *and* PALESTINE

1914 to June, 1917

*Illustrating the*  
FIELD SERVICE REGULATIONS



BY

A. KEARSEY, D.S.O., O.B.E., p.s.c.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is hoped that these unofficial notes, compiled from despatches and official maps and from notes made personally during the campaign, will add to the general interest of the Operations in Egypt and Palestine, 1914—June 1917.



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# THE OPERATIONS IN EGYPT AND PALESTINE, 1914 TO JUNE, 1917

## CHAPTER I.

### APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH TURKEY.

1. SITUATION. Turkey declared war on Britain on October 30th, 1914, and had mobilized in August. Roumania, Bulgaria, and Greece were still neutral. On December 17th, Egypt, with the sanction of France, became a British Protectorate.

The suzerainty of Turkey disappeared, and Britain became responsible for the defence of Egypt and for her foreign relations.

2. OBJECTS. Our main object in Egypt was the defence of the Suez Canal. The Turks meant to regain her lost provinces from Britain, from Russia, and from Persia. Her first object in dealing with Britain in this area was to interfere with the Suez Canal.

This main artery of intercommunication between the East and West was vital to us, both for our reinforcements and for our supplies to the Western Front. Egypt also was important, being centrally situated, as a training ground for troops from India and the Commonwealth. From this country we could obtain oil, sugar, cotton, and grain. Egypt was also a training ground for Australian, Indian and British troops, a base for the Allied Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, from which contingents could be sent in any direction.

3. FACTORS affecting the attainment of the object:

(a) *Strength and location of opposing forces.* The Turkish Army was organized to form fifteen divisions. In October

their VIII Army Corps of three divisions and some troops of their XII Army Corps with third-line and depot troops, were in Syria. Djemal Pasha was given the command of their "Army of Egypt," later called the Syrian Army.

This consisted of their IV Corps, which, at the end of November, was moved from Smyrna into Central Syria, when it was joined by its 10th Division, some heavy artillery, also pontoon and ammunition trains. At this time, they left at Adana their III and V Army Corps.

Early in 1915, four first-line divisions, two divisions composed of second-line and depot troops, with 15,000 Tarabin, Azazma, and Howeytet Arab irregulars, were in Central and Southern Syria or grouped about Aleppo and Damascus, to protect the coast or to operate in Mesopotamia, Arabia, or towards Egypt under Djemal Pasha. Out of this force he was able to make up an expeditionary army of approximately 65,000 men.

Their Hedjaz Division had also been brought up from Medina to Nekhl. By the time Turkey had declared war, the 42nd Territorial Division had arrived in Egypt.

By the end of the year, the 10th and 11th Indian Divisions, the Yeomanry, and Australian and New Zealand divisions had brought our total numbers in Egypt up to 70,000, exclusive of some 22,000 Egyptian and Sudanese troops.

Therefore, we had available a far stronger force than could be brought against the Canal by the Turks.

(b) *Topography.* To reach the Canal from Syria, there were three possible routes, 120 to 140 miles long. The northern route from El Arish was close to the Mediterranean coast at this place, and then branched inland through Mazar, Abd, and Qatiya, to Qantara, twenty-five miles south of Port Said.

In this northern zone, the road via El Arish, Mazar, Abd and Qatiya from Rafah to the Canal is passable for men and camels. It is 125 miles long, and is protected against bombardment from the sea by the coastal dunes and by the Bardowal Lagoon and its bar. The country is for the most part soft sand, in places blown into large undulating hillocks. Between Mazar and Abd (thirty miles apart), and also south of Qatiya, sand-dunes cover many square miles.

A salt-water lagoon stretches between the coast north of Mazar and Qatiya. It is divided from the sea by a narrow spit of land. Farther west of this lagoon there are more salt lakes and marshes as far as the Canal stretches over the Pelusium Plain, which is a bare expanse of salty mud. In the winter it is covered with stagnant pools; in the summer it becomes a quagmire.

Throughout the coastal area, water is obtainable by digging, and at El Arish there are many wells, so that cultivation is possible. Near Qatiya, Abd, and Dueidar on the northern route leading to Qantara are many wells, but the quality of the water is brackish.

On the central route from Auja towards Ismailia at Rigm, twenty-five miles east of the northern end of the Great Bitter Lake, there were large pools of water at the end of 1914 filled from the Wadi Mukhsheib. In addition, near this central route water can be found at Hassana, fifty miles south-west of Auja, at Hamma, twenty miles north-west of Hassana, and at Harab, ten miles south-east of Rigm.

In this central area, there are only a few miles of drift sand. The remainder of this region is a barren, undulating, stony expanse. The hills rise to a height of 3,000 feet above sea-level, and up to 1,500 feet above the average land level.

Except where there is drift sand, between Hamma and Jifjafa, this central route is passable by wheeled traffic. Along the southern route, via Nekhl, there is little water. On the greater part of this route wheels can pass. From Aqaba to Nekhl the route leads through a series of defiles. The Turks, therefore, decided to make only a series of demonstrations along this Darbal Hadj route towards the southern sector of the Canal defences.

The central route, from Aqaba at the head of the gulf of that name on the Red Sea, crosses the base of the Peninsula of Sinai to a point on the Canal a little to the north of Suez, via Themed and Nekhl.

It was, therefore, possible for an enterprising enemy provided with modern artillery to establish himself sufficiently near the eastern bank of the Canal to impede navigation there. The difficulty for the Turks to maintain themselves in that position depended on their communications with Southern Palestine being adequately organized for the transmission of food, water and ammunition.

The unsuitability of the northern and southern routes for his transport led Djemal Pasha to adopt the central route for his main attack.

(c) *Morale and Training.* The Turkish Army consisted of Anatolians, Arabs, Armenians, Circassians, Kurds, Syrians and Levantines, as well as of Turks. They were, on the whole, hardy and stubborn fighters in defence, and were quick in making local counter-attacks.

Their system for the supply of clothing, stores and equipment was poor. Their officers were, for the most part, from the cities. They were completely subservient to the Germans. As the war progressed, the Germans controlled more and more

the operations and services. Their groups, sent to strengthen each Turkish army, consisted of a battery, a battalion, a squadron and technical detachments of Flying Corps, telegraph, mechanical transport, and railway detachments, added considerably to the efficiency and fighting strength of our enemies.

The Turkish Commander-in-Chief in Syria was Djemal Pasha. In 1914, he was the Turkish Minister of Marine. He was courageous and energetic, but somewhat bombastic, as his exhortation to his troops on June 25th, 1915, shows. It was as follows:—

“Before you is the craven enemy, behind him the rich land of Egypt. If you falter, death will overtake you. Before you Paradise lies.”

His Chief of Staff was a Bavarian Colonel—Kress von Kressenstein—who was an able officer. Djemal was bitterly anti-English, and a convinced pan-Ottoman.

(d) *Communications.* In Egypt there were no metalled roads except in the chief cities. On the western side of the Canal, which is 100 miles long, a lateral railway runs the whole way from Port Said to Suez, connecting at Ismailia with the line via Zagazig to Cairo. A fresh-water canal is also alongside this bank from Suez to Qantara. The Suez Canal, which is thirty miles from the delta, is over 200 feet broad. The banks in places rise at an angle of 30 degrees to a height of 40 feet, thus making the Canal into a strong position for passive defence, with a good field of fire over the flat ground to the east of the Canal, except in the few places where the sand-dunes give cover, as, for instance, south-east of Ismailia, of Qantara, and of the Bitter Lake. It cannot be turned, as it runs from the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean. From the Turkish advanced bases at Gaza and Beersheba there was no railway beyond Kossaima to assist an advance, and no route for mechanical transport.

The Hedjaz railway to Mecca did not help them in Sinai, as between it and the peninsula were rocky mountains to be crossed, and between these mountains was the Wadi Ghor, 3,000 feet below their summits.

The roads across the Sinai Peninsula were the immediate communications affecting the Turkish operations. These roads were by the coast, by the central route from Beersheba or El Arish through Hassana or Hamma and Jifafa, or by the Darbel Hadj pilgrims' road through Nekhl to Suez.

The guiding factors for the choice of a route depended considerably on the water and facilities for transporting guns. The northern route was most vulnerable to shell fire from the sea; the southern route had the least water. The central

route was the best road. Therefore, the Turks decided to use it for the bulk of their troops in their advance against the Canal.

Their Hedjaz railway (3 ft. 6 in. gauge) ran to Mecca, but it was of little use beyond Deraa (fifty miles south of Damascus). From Maan this line ran up to a branch at Aleppo for 450 miles, through Jerusalem, where a branch led to Jaffa; through Deraa, where it branched west to the coast at Haifa via Afule and Beisan; through Damascus and Rayak, where it ran to Beirut. From Rayak the line becomes standard gauge up to Aleppo and thence to Adana, Bozanti, and Konia, and then 700 miles on to Constantinople.

The tunnels through the Amanus and Taurus Mountains were incomplete, so that there was considerable delay, as troops and transport had to march through these unfinished sections. South of Aleppo there were no repair shops, and wood fuel only was obtainable. Consequently, the Turks were at a great disadvantage in their communications with Sinai and Palestine.

The two important places in Sinai are El Arish and Nekhl, respectively 100 and sixty miles away from the Suez Canal. Both these villages get their water from the Wadi El Arish.

(e) *Weather.* The extent of the rainfall in November and December annually enabled the Sinai Peninsula to be crossed by an army, as the rock pools on the possible lines of advance were filled during these months. In the winter of 1914-15, the Wadi El Arish wells were adequately filled up. This wadi is usually in spate for two or three days at a time during the winter, and until March there are pools in the wells and rock cisterns of the wadis.

Also the Wadi Um Mukhsheib ran in spate into the large pool at Rigm. This was a great asset for an army advancing from Auja on Ismailia. During the winter also the rain pools along the southern route at Djebel Raha were well filled.

(f) *Time and Space.* To develop the full strength of their Syrian striking force of 65,000 men against our Canal defences, the Turks would have to cover the Sinai Peninsula at least 120 to 140 miles wide, then to their advanced bases at Gaza and Beersheba there was a further twenty-five miles, a further 170 miles by the 3 ft. 6 in. railway would bring them to Rayak, where the standard gauge was reached 1,200 miles from their capital. Therefore, there could be no possibility of a surprise attack by the Turks on a large scale.

Added difficulties were a bad road across the Amanus Mountains above Baghche, running south-east through difficult country towards Aleppo. In winter this road is constantly blocked by snow. Similarly the ten miles of road over the



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Taurus Mountains were blocked for a few days at a time during bad weather between Karapunar and Dorak.

This road over the Taurus leads to Adana, fifty miles north-west of Alexandretta, where it crosses the Amanus Range by the Bailan Pass, which has easy gradients. But it is exposed between Payaz and Alexandretta to naval bombardment. This road is not protected by forts. Therefore, the Turks, in order to reinforce their Syrian Army, had to risk losses from the gunfire of our fleet or to move farther inland over the Amanus from Baghche to Radju, where they might be blocked for two to three weeks at a time.

The distance between Alexandretta and Aleppo is seventy-five miles; it is ten times as far between Egypt and Aleppo.

At this place we were astride the communications of the enemy between their capital and Baghdad and Egypt.

Their communications could be effectively attacked by a force landing between Alexandretta and Payaz, where only a few trenches had been constructed along the shore and on the Bailan Pass. However, although we had command of the sea as far as surface ships were concerned, we had also to consider the submarine, which set a definite limit to the possibilities of amphibious operations.

On our side, the distance from Port Said to Suez is 100 miles. From Suez there is a road eighty miles long to Cairo on the Nile. In the centre of the Canal is Ismailia, where there is a railway junction and the junction of ship and sweet-water canals. This sweet-water canal is 30 feet across and about 5 feet deep. From Suez to the north end of the Bitter Lake at Deversoir, the Canal and railway on its western bank cross the uncultivated desert.

From this place up to Ferry Post east of Ismailia at the northern end of Lake Timsah, there is a belt of cultivated land half a mile wide. From Ismailia the Canal runs through a deep cutting for two miles, then through an uncultivated stretch of desert for eighteen miles. The sweet-water canal is five miles west of the ship canal at Ferry Post until it joins up with it again at Qantara. For its northern twenty-five miles, the Canal has Lake Merzala on the west and Lake Tina, eighteen miles long, on the east. Therefore, from an enemy's point of view in advancing on the Canal, the central part would be the best to make for as regards water and cultivation and for a further advance to the Nile via the sweet-water canal.

The distance to be traversed across the peninsula and the cover to be obtained in the vicinity of the Canal east and south-east of Ismailia would make the central route most favourable for the Turks' advance on the Canal.

## 4. COURSES:

(i) *Open to the Turks.*

(a) To remain in Palestine and to leave the obstacle of the Sinai Peninsula to be crossed by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Such an operation would be slow and costly for a large force. A small force could be encountered by their superior numbers concentrated at their advanced bases to be formed near Gaza and Beersheba.

They would then be free to concentrate all available men for the Mesopotamia campaign, where we were making progress up the Tigris towards Baghdad.

This course would not, however, add to our difficulties in dealing with the Egyptian problems. They hoped to be able to interfere with the shipping in the Canal, and later to occupy the habitable and fertile country of the Nile and its delta.

They hoped also to enlist on their side the powerful Bedouin clan by their operations.

(b) To advance on the Suez Canal in one body.

(c) To advance on the Suez Canal by the three available routes.

With reference to (b), it must be noted that the Turks had no railways beyond their bases at Gaza and Kossaima to assist their advance, and no route for mechanical transport.

The water supply on any one route would be inadequate for a large force, such as Djemal Pasha finally had available for the attack on the Canal, namely, a cavalry regiment, two 6-inch howitzers, two mountain batteries, seven field batteries, two engineer and pontoon companies, two machine-gun companies, twenty-one battalions with Arab auxiliaries. There could be no surprise attack if their whole army came together, and we could, with our railway west of the Canal and to Cairo from Ismailia, rapidly concentrate vastly superior numbers at one point to deal with any one body that could march across the desert.

The Suez Canal was, for an attacker, in the nature of a broad, deep river, navigable for warships which could quickly be brought to the support of troops at any point at which they were attacked. For an attack on a river or canal, especially as in this case where the flanks cannot be turned, it is necessary to mystify and mislead an enemy and prevent him from concentrating at any one point.

(d) Therefore, the Turks' choice of a plan was reduced to a consideration as to the best route by which to make their main attack, and where their subsidiary attacks should be. These three lines of advance were (1) across the centre of the

## 8 OPERATIONS IN EGYPT AND PALESTINE

Sinai Hills; (2) by the Pilgrims' road to Suez from Nekhl; (3) along the coast from El Arish through Abd and Qatiya.

Also they had to consider in what strength they would advance by each route, and at what time of year.

(ii) *Open to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*

(a) To develop the naturally strong line of defence afforded by the Canal.

(b) To maintain an active defence east of the Canal.

(c) To advance across the Sinai Peninsula and attack the Turks assembling in Palestine.

The advantages of the course suggested in (a) were that the Canal made a secure concealed defensive line. The enemy would be in ignorance as to the strength and locality of the defenders, who, by improving communications, could rapidly out of their total available numbers of 70,000 men concentrate superior numbers at any one point.

The disadvantages were that the enemy could assemble within artillery range of the Canal, and could thus interfere with the shipping on the Canal. Thus, instead of defending the Canal, the Canal would be protecting the troops.

With reference to (b), the area Qatiya-Romani offered accommodation in which a large number of troops could obtain water. Such an area was essential to the Turks if they advanced in force against Egypt. Though the desert was a considerable obstacle to any enemy advancing in a westerly direction against the Canal, it was also a screen to their movements. An active defence would be more economical in man-power, so that divisions could be sent to the Western Front. The *morale* and efficiency of all ranks are increased by an offensive attitude.

The warding off of attacks could lead to no decisive results; the Turks would be free to resume their operations for interrupting the vitally important communications of the Suez Canal whenever they had the troops and time available.

On the other hand, it would be very expensive to push out a line of fortifications east of the Canal, and to extend the standard-gauge railway and to add to the pipe lines and pumping stations to keep the troops supplied.

The expense would be very considerable also for supplies, as there were none available locally for a large force. Therefore, the standard-gauge railway and pipe would have to accompany our troops for 140 miles.

We were not certain as to the actual numbers which the Turks might bring against us, and our position might be very vulnerable with a long line of communication, which would be easy to dislocate.

It was not certain that if we advanced by any one route the Turks would not advance by other routes to attack the small forces which we could afford to leave behind for the Canal defences. We had not yet gained sufficient information as to the country in our front and its resources.

5. PLANS. The plan, therefore, decided on for the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was as follows:—

The Canal defences were divided into sections, in each of which were fortified bridgeheads at Qantara, El Ferdan, Ismailia Ferry, Tussum, Serapeum, Shallufa, and Kubri, on the eastern bank covered by entrenched positions on the western bank. North and south of Qantara the ground was flooded by letting the Canal flow into the Menzaleh and Ballah Lakes, in order to limit the front, on which the Turks could develop an attack. Ships patrolled the Timsah and Bitter Lakes and the Syrian and Arabian coasts.

The central defences were organized in three sections, with headquarters respectively at Suez for the southern section, at Ismailia Ferry for the central section, and at Qantara for the northern section. In the southern section there were fortified posts on the east bank of the Canal at Shatt, Kubri and Geneffe. In the central section the fortified posts were at Deversoir, Serapeum, Ferry Post and Ferdan. In the northern section there were fortified posts at Ballah, Qantara, and Port Said Salt Works.

The garrisons for these posts were the 10th and part of the 11th Indian Divisions. Headquarters of the G.O.C. Canal Defences and a reserve of the remainder of the 11th Division, and the Imperial Service Camel Brigade were at Moascar, close to Ismailia. All posts were linked up with headquarters by a system of telegraph, telephone and wireless communications. "All arrangements were completed by the 5th December, 1914, when the last units of the force arrived from India."\*

The Turkish plan was to advance on the Canal by the three available routes across the Sinai Peninsula. The main attack was to be made in the centre from the vicinity of Moiya Harab and Wadi Mukhsheib, with some 6,000 infantry and some artillery, and a pontoon train against Serapeum and Tussum, and a similar force against Ismailia Ferry, while they made raids on the north with some 3,000 infantry with mounted men and some guns towards Qantara and Ferdan; and on the south with three battalions and a mountain battery. Their total force was approximately 12,000 to 15,000 men with artillery and pontoons. This force entrained at Damascus for Afule.

\* *Vide* Despatches dated February 11th, 1915.

They marched then via Jerusalem, Hebron, Beersheba, Auja to El Arish by January 13th, 1915. Twelve days later their advanced parties were eight miles from Qantara.

The result of the Turkish operations was that their main attacks were driven back, and their raids in the vicinity of Qantara and Suez failed. By February 8th, 1915, they were not within forty miles of the Canal.

## APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION

### AT THE BEGINNING OF 1916.

1. OBJECT. Our object was to make dispositions for the active defence of Egypt.

2. FACTORS affecting its attainment.

(a) *Strength and location of opposing forces.* It was estimated that the Turkish troops in Syria amounted to 250,000, of which possibly two-fifths could be concentrated and supplied for an advance on Egypt. Reinforcements could not be sent to Syria owing to Russian activities in Asia which led to their capture of Erzerum and Trebizond before the end of April.

The Germans were increasing the numbers and efficiency of the Turkish aircraft. In addition on the Western Desert the Arabs were causing anxiety. Raids had been made into Kordofan, and into the Farafra, Dakhla and Kharga Oases.

Our own force in Egypt consisted of thirteen divisions. However, if we had a more active defence on a line east of the Canal four divisions and three mounted brigades would meet all the requirements of defence and of dealing with any force the Turks could bring against us.

(b) *Topography.* Roads and water were the chief consideration in this phase of the campaign. The most important road centres in the Sinai Peninsula are at Hassana, Nekhl and Kossaima. At Nekhl the roads branch from Aqaba, Kossaima and El Arish in a westerly direction on Suez.

At Kossaima, roads branch to Beersheba, Aqaba, and to El Arish, and thence south-west to Hassana and Suez. At El Arish one road leads west through Oghratina and the Qatiya Oasis to Qantara, and also one road branches south down the Wadi El Arish and then west via Bir Maghara to Ismailia.

Therefore, if the enemy concentrated at Beersheba their most likely lines of advance would be via El Arish or via

Kossaima, as these were the two nearest road centres for a force advancing from the east towards the Canal.

Only by advancing to one of these places could a force reach Nekhl unless a very long detour was made. Therefore, the forty-five miles of country, including both Kossaima and El Arish, were important from the point of view of a force defending the Canal. If this area could be watched by mobile troops and R.A.F., there could be no surprise attack. The El Arish route appeared to be the most suitable line of advance owing to the water in the Wadi at this place which could support a force of about 40,000, and owing to the fact also that the Qatiya-Romani area afforded water supply for an equally large number of troops. However, this route was open to the fire of our ships.

On none of the other routes leading to the Canal were the possibilities of obtaining water for a large force so favourable. Therefore the best line of advance for our troops if an offensive was contemplated would be those which would deny to the enemy the opportunity of concentrating in the areas where water supply was most plentiful, namely, Qatiya and then El Arish.

(c) *Communications.* The Turkish communications were incomplete, as their Constantinople line via Konia was continuous from Haidar Pasha east of the Bosphorus only to Bozanti, west of the Taurus Mountains. The Amanus Mountains, seventy-five miles east of the Taurus, similarly had not been tunnelled.

Consequently, in winter it was a long, slow, and arduous march for troops and transport to cross these mountain roads. Often they were completely blocked by snow. Once across the Taurus, they could travel by broad gauge for 180 miles to Rayak, east of Beirut. Then, again, they had to detrain in order to entrain into the 3 ft. 6 in. line, which would take them via Deraa, Semakh, Afule, Jerusalem, Junction, Sheria towards Beersheba, which was becoming an advanced base. At Deraa, the Hedjaz railway, also 3 ft. 6 in. gauge, ran south to Maan and then 500 miles on to Medina.

At Maan, their forces would be 150 miles from Nekhl by the only possible route across the Edom Plateau and the Sinai Peninsula. At Beersheba they were only fifty miles away from El Arish.

Therefore, the northern route appeared to be the one indicated from the point of view of distance as well as of water facilities. At Nekhl, less than half the numbers could be supplied with water than it would be possible to supply at El Arish. Nor from Nekhl westwards to the Canal was the water situation so favourable as from El Arish. Between

Nekhl and the Canal, there is only one area large enough to provide water for the largest force that could be accommodated at Nekhl, and that place was half-way from Nekhl to Suez and at least three marches from the Canal.

As to our communications, a railway ran alongside the western bank of the Suez Canal, with a branch at Ismailia via Zagazig to Cairo.

If our advance was to be continued across the Sinai Peninsula, it would be necessary to supply our troops from a base on the Canal by means of trains and pipes through which drinking water could be pumped. Across the Sinai Peninsula alone this distance was at least 120 miles from Qantara.

The Egyptian Labour Corps would have to be augmented for railway construction, and first-line transport would have to be reorganized on a camel and donkey basis, to enable troops to be supplied in the desert from railhead.

Time would be required for this work. The advance, too, must be slow, as it would depend on the rate of railway construction, which was estimated at about twenty miles a month. Our best and most protected line of advance was the coastal route via Qatiya, and Abd, to El Arish. Along this route there were many wells available to supplement the pipe supply. Water was close to the surface near the coast, and was fit for animals to drink. On the other two routes across the peninsula there are barren, stony, precipitous hills north and south both of Hassana and of Nekhl.

(d) *Morale and Training.* There were thirteen divisions (approximately 400,000 men) now available in Egypt, and an advanced line east of the Canal was being constructed. There were ample numbers available, so that a large part of the force could be rested and trained, while the remainder were engaged in fortifying and digging the new defences. There were three sections, in each of which was one corps. In the southern sector, from Suez to Kabrit, was the IX Corps. In the central sector, from Kabrit to Ferdan, was the Anzac Corps. In the northern sector, from Ferdan to Port Said, was the XV Corps. Each was able to arrange its own reliefs, and periods of rest and of training for its units, so that the tired divisions from Gallipoli were soon in a fit condition to take the field. At Cairo, and in the Nile Valley also, there were respectively one division at each place.

Both in numbers and *morale* we were superior to the Turks, who could not bring more than 100,000 men to Egypt, and the journey across the desert would undoubtedly lessen their vitality and consequently their *morale*.

(e) *Supplies and Transport.* Steps were being taken to add to the mobility of the force by organizing camel companies,



each of 2,000 camels, and also donkey companies, each of 2,000 donkeys. Eventually 35,000 camels and 8,000 donkeys were raised; as well as six divisional trains, each of seventy-two limbered G.S. wagons, and two mixed horse and motor transport trains, each capable of carrying seventy tons of supplies.

The bulk of our supplies had to be sea-borne, as the only fertile and habitable part of Egypt was the Nile Delta, the remainder being desert except in the small oases.

(f) *Weather.* In the northern coastal area, there is a regular rainfall in January and February. Rock cisterns in the desert hold the water for several months and make it possible for troops to move in the desert.

(g) *Time and Space.* To defend the whole length of the Canal was at this time causing us to use up a larger number of troops than would be necessary if we occupied a forward position from which we could deny to the enemy concentration areas from which they could advance to attack.

From Suez to the north of the great Bitter Lake is forty miles, a further fifteen miles bring us to Ferry Post, then to our new base at Qantara is another twenty miles, and it is twenty-five miles on to the northern end of the Canal, at Port Said.

This front of 100 miles could be most easily attacked either by the sandy coastal route through Abd and Qatiya, from Rafah to Qantara, or over the Sinai Hills from Beersheba, to Ismailia, or by the Pilgrims' road from Aqaba, to Suez.

The Turkish main base was their Constantinople station in Asia at Haidar Pasha. A single railway line, broken in two places, namely, over the Amanus and Taurus Mountains, connected this base with their advanced base at Beersheba.

Their rolling stock was not good, and their fuel was insufficient, so that as a rule troops had to march from Rayak to their advanced base.

The important distances from our point of view were to the places which would enable the Turks to concentrate in large numbers preparatory to an advance on the Canal. These were the area between Mageibra, Qatiya and Romani, thirty-five miles from the Canal on a front of twenty miles, and also the forty-five miles between Kossaima and El Arish, 100 miles east of the Canal.

### 3. COURSES:

*Open to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*

- (a) To continue to hold the western bank of the Canal.
- (b) To occupy a position east of the Canal.
- (c) To carry out an offensive campaign against the Turks.

(a) This system had already been tried. Some 12,000 Turks had been able to cross the desert and to cause the traffic in the Canal to be suspended. It was vital for us to keep open this channel of communication between the east and the west, and this could not be done, it was now seen, unless the Canal was defended so far east of it that it would be out of long-range artillery fire. Also it was difficult to arrange for an active defence west of the Canal.

In the Turks' previous raid, their attempts to cross the Canal were easily broken up by our fire action, but, though we had approximately 70,000 men available, we had not been able to inflict a decisive defeat upon them. They had been able to withdraw with a loss of less than 10 per cent. of their personnel and with all their artillery.

Unless we occupied a forward position, the Turks might concentrate a large body of troops in the Qatiya area and smaller bodies on the central and southern route across the Sinai Peninsula within striking distance of the Canal.

Therefore, in view of the importance of keeping the Canal free from hostile interference, it was essential to ensure that no formed bodies of the enemy were able to come within striking distance of it. This could only be done by an advance east of the Canal.

(b) The point then arises how far east should the Egyptian Expeditionary Force go, and in which direction.

If the enemy made their advanced base at Maan on the Hedjaz railway, then it would be necessary to advance towards Nekhl. If, on the other hand, he made his northern base at Beersheba, it would be necessary to advance towards El Arish. Actually, Beersheba was their railhead and base.

Therefore it would be preferable to advance by the coastal route. The central route would not be so suitable as a line of advance, owing to the difficulty of the route, and owing to the fact that the enemy would be less likely to make use of it from Beersheba, as Hassana, which is the principal water area on it, has not an adequate supply in the spring and summer for a large force.

The point then arises how far east of the Canal should a position be occupied to enable the Egyptian Expeditionary Force to carry out an active defence, and to economize men for use in the main theatre of war on the Western Front. For an initial advance, then, if the Qatiya-Romani area was occupied, this important water supply, within two marches for the enemy to the Canal, would be denied to them, and our force of thirteen divisions could be reduced to seven.

(c) To carry out an offensive campaign against the Turks would require much time for preparation, and considerable

expenditure. Nor at the present time could it be foreseen where the Turks meant to assemble. An advance against so mobile an enemy as the Turks might be a blow in the air, and might open the Canal to a destructive raid on their part at a time when the bulk of our troops were advancing.

An offensive campaign would also strain the resources of our man-power. The troops in Egypt were looked upon as a strategical reserve for the Empire not to be utilized entirely for local operations.

An active defence would be the most economical from the point of view of conserving man-power. This would, from the vicinity of Qatiya and Romani, prevent the enemy from reaching the Canal by day or night or interfering with its navigation.

By bringing out the railway to Qatiya and by denying this area to the enemy, it would be possible to organize a mobile column for offensive operations.

The enemy would have the disadvantage of crossing some sixty miles of sandy desert from El Arish to reach the Qatiya Oasis. It should then be possible to assume the offensive against these troops with every prospect of success. The necessity of having to accompany any large force in the desert with a railway and pipe line must necessarily limit the possibilities of offensive action, and must make any advance slow and deliberate.

*Plan.* Our plan, therefore, was to carry out an active defence and to reduce the number of troops in Egypt. Our first advance was to be to the Qatiya area, where the railway and pipe line would be brought. This might be, in accordance with our future policy, the beginning of an offensive if men and materials were available, which would enable us to clear the Turks from the Sinai Peninsula, and finally to co-operate with the forces in Mesopotamia by an advance through Palestine and Syria to a position astride the enemy's communications with Constantinople and Baghdad at Aleppo.

Operations must, however, begin with the occupation of the Qatiya Oasis, which was to be held with one division and three mounted brigades. A reserve of three divisions on the Canal would also be required. The line of fortifications east of and running parallel to the Canal could be abandoned and gradually some of the thirteen divisions in Egypt could be sent to other theatres of war as soon as they were rested. Before the end of March, 1916, six divisions had left Egypt.

#### *Open to the Turks.*

- (a) To concentrate their efforts against our Mesopotamian Force.

(b) To avoid our advance in Palestine until they could concentrate sufficient numbers at their advanced bases in Palestine, in order to fight under more equal conditions than would be possible if they crossed the Sinai Peninsula.

(c) To take the offensive and to cross the desert for another attack against the Canal defences.

(a) It was difficult to foresee at this time what the policy of the Turks would be. Special reinforcements, known as Pasha groups, each consisting of a squadron, a battery, and a battalion, and technical detachments, had been organized in Germany by this time for service in Palestine. However, the Turks had their forces still split up for operations in the Caucasus, in Mesopotamia, in Arabia, or in Egypt. Possibly at this time the Turks had 150,000 men between Jerusalem and the Sinai frontier. The Russian campaign, which resulted in the capture of Erzerum and Trebizond, prevented them from sending large reinforcements to their Sinai front.

They had also to consider the safety of their communications at Alexandretta. We had evacuated in December, 1915, at Gallipoli our trenches at Suvla and Anzac, and early in January, 1916 we had evacuated Helles, and so we were free to make use of the shipping released from this expedition for a possible landing at this place, seventy-five miles from Aleppo.

At this time, the Turks were relieved of all anxiety as to Baghdad, as General Townshend was invested at Kut, and they appeared to be satisfied with the position there, as they were not unduly pressing. They had, however, already sent 30,000 troops as reinforcements to this theatre of war, and it did not appear at present that they could, with their other commitments, bring to bear a force of greater strength than 40,000 men.

(b) If they awaited our advance in the vicinity of their advanced bases in Palestine, they would not be carrying out the policy prescribed for them by the Germans. Germany ordained for the Turks' share in the war against Britain that the Suez Canal, Egypt and Southern Persia should be threatened, to force us to weaken our strength in the main theatre of war on the Western Front. Already a corps was engaged in Mesopotamia, and reinforcements were hurrying up the Tigris for the relief of Kut. In Egypt we had approximately 400,000 men.

If, therefore, Turkey assumed a passive attitude now against the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, it would be possible to withdraw a considerable proportion of our troops for action

against Germany. This the Germans obviously did not desire. One of the main reasons for bringing Turkey into the war had been to withdraw a proportion of our fighting forces from the Western Front.

Now the Germans required the Turks to maintain a pressure on their Egyptian front.

(c) It was, therefore, decided that the Turks should take the offensive. Their chief considerations then would have to be in what strength and by what route they could cross the Sinai Peninsula.

Early in 1915 they had made a raid with some 12,000 men. They had advanced by three roads, with no lateral inter-communication. Their attacks had been unco-ordinated, and had not achieved their objects. Yet it had given them encouragement for future efforts. They had crossed the desert and had been in touch with the troops defending the Canal. Their *morale* had not been lowered unduly, as we had not been able to turn their retreat into a rout. Their experience must have shown them the possibilities for further offensive operations. They had been able to gain an extensive knowledge as to the three lines of advance across the desert and as to the available water supply.

They would be able to assess the advantages of speed of marching and possible surprise if they advanced by three routes as before; in comparison with concentration of force if they attacked by the northern route, by which water was the most plentiful. Of the numbers available, they might be able to concentrate at their advanced base for operations against Egypt 100,000 men. They could not, however, have fed and maintained this number in Sinai for any length of time.

As to the time of year for their offensive, it would unquestionably have been best for the Turks to have waited until the autumn or winter. Their troops by that time would have been more adequately equipped and trained for crossing the desert. If they crossed the desert in the summer, the water supply would be at its lowest, the heat would be intense, and the Khamsin winds would add to their discomfort.

*Plan.* Their plan, however, was to organize a striking force for offensive operations under a Bavarian Colonel—Kress von Kressenstein—to start from close to their advanced base at Shellal with fifteen battalions of their 3rd and 23rd Divisions, two mountain batteries, some heavy artillery, engineers, and two Camel Corps companies.

Their line of advance was via El Arish, Abd, and Oghratina. Their first objective was to gain possession of the Qatiya-Romani area.

Actually, their force of 18,000 men reached Oghratina by

July 19th, 1916. On the night of August 3rd/4th, they began their attacks on our positions on a six-mile front, from east of Romani to Mount Royston, five miles south of Pelusium, supported by artillery from Bir Abu Hamra. This attack failed with a loss to them of 50 per cent. of their force.

They were never again able to threaten Egypt or the Suez Canal. The offensive then passed to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

## APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION

### AT THE BEGINNING OF 1917.

1. OBJECT. Our object was still the active defence of Egypt.

2. FACTORS affecting its attainment.

(a) *Strength and location of opposing forces.* The enemy in the vicinity of Southern Palestine might be estimated at approximately 1,500 sabres, three weak divisions, providing a total of approximately 12,000 to 16,000 rifles and 74 guns.

Our own troops available for further offensive action would be the 52nd, 53rd and 54th Divisions, and the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division, the Imperial Mounted Division, a light-car patrol, and two light-armoured motor batteries, making a total of 8,500 sabres, 92 guns, and 25,000 rifles.

In addition to the Eastern Force just enumerated, there would be the 74th Division, which was being formed in Egypt from Yeomanry units.

Our position at El Arish would enable us to advance on Beersheba via Auja or via Rafah on Gaza. The Turks' main body was disposed about the area Huj-Nejile, with detachments at Gaza, Hureira, Sheria and Beersheba and, as already noted, in the Wadi Arish at Auja and Kossaima to cover their base at Beersheba. Large reinforcements would not be expected, as General Maude was pressing them on the Tigris. Their forces were dissipated in detachments.

(b) *Topography.* The area most suited for mobile warfare and for the operations of our mounted arm, in which we had a large preponderance, was the coastal Plain of Philistia, about twenty miles wide.

East of this plain are the Judæan Hills, which are passable only for a body of troops by the road running from south to north from Beersheba via Hebron to Jerusalem. Through Jerusalem a road runs north-east to Jericho and west to Jaffa.

From Gaza, partially metalled roads run by the coast of Jaffa and for thirty-five miles in an easterly direction to Beersheba.

The most important features in this area are the Wadis, which are transverse obstacles, at right angles to our line of advance in a northerly direction. Half-way between Gaza and Belah is the Wadi Ghazze. One of its main branches runs past Sheria and Hureira, and another branch from Esani north-east past Beersheba and south-east to Khalasa and Asluj. It is a formidable obstacle, as its sides are very steep, and its bed is stony in places. It is 300 yards wide. Water can be found by digging near the coast, and there are springs at Jemmi, Khalasa, Asluj, and Esani. These water supplies, when developed, are valuable for a mounted force advancing on Beersheba.

An important point to be noted for the use of cavalry is the nature of the country between Sheria and Beersheba, where, owing to the Judæan foothills, it is rocky, and is consequently not so suitable for mounted action as it is in the downs west of Sheria.

South of the Wadi Ghazze there is excellent cover for troops advancing in a northerly direction. At In Seirat Hill, four miles east of the coast, there is a dominating position commanding a view over the Wadi Ghazze, and over the ground north of it. Gaza stands on an irrigated plateau, with a series of ridges surrounded by high cactus hedges, which make a very strong natural obstacle against advancing infantry, and in which were valuable machine-gun nests for the Turks.

The centre of this town is about 4,000 yards from the sea. West of the road from Gaza to Rafah there is a long sandy ridge running south-west. This we named Samson Ridge.

The highest point on it, 4,000 yards from the centre of Gaza, is a hill which we called Umbrella Hill. About a mile south-east of Gaza is Ali Muntar, 270 feet high. This hill dominates the town, and its occupation by our troops should make Gaza untenable for the Turks. From Ali Muntar are two ridges running south to the Wadi Ghazze.

The western one is called Sire, and the eastern one is Burjabye. From Ali Muntar we named the points on Sire Ridge Outpost, Lees, and Kurd Hills respectively from north to south in this order. Six thousand yards south-east of Ali Muntar is Sheikh Abbas, which forms a salient running west along Mansura to Kurd Hill, and south to the Wadi Ghazze.

(c) *Communications.* The Turks' communications between the Wadi El Arish and Beersheba would be in danger if we could advance rapidly on Rafah and then on Gaza before they had time to withdraw, as we should then be behind their



advanced base. On the other hand, the state of our communications prevented a rapid advance, owing to the difficulty of maintaining any large body of troops beyond the Wadi El Arish, as the railway had only just reached this point. To supply troops north of the Wadi, it would be necessary to reorganize the supply and transport arrangements, in order to facilitate the mobility of the Eastern Force.

(d) *Time and Space.* The important distances to be considered were from Wadi El Arish to Rafah and then on to Gaza, as the coastal route is the most likely one for operations on a large scale.

The distance between El Arish and Gaza is practically the same as between Kossaima and Beersheba, namely, forty-five miles. The Turks, however, could withdraw their detachment at Kossaima back more quickly to Beersheba, as a light railway connected these two places. We, on the other hand, had limits to our mobility by the fact that railhead and pipehead for water supply were not yet up to the Wadi Ghazze.

El Arish to Rafah is twenty-five miles.

Belah, where there was ample water for all the horses in the Eastern Force, is half-way between Gaza and Rafah.

There was an excellent water supply at Rafah and at Khan Yunis, which is five and a half miles north-east of Rafah on the way to Gaza.

### 3. COURSES:

(i) Open to the Turks were limited, owing to their dispersion and to their local inferiority in numbers.

(a) They could assemble at Kossaima, where they would be a menace on our southern flank. In this case they could not concentrate there from their main position at Huj-Nejile before our Eastern Force could reach Gaza. Kossaima by their best route—via Beersheba—would be a third as far again as our advance on Gaza, which would then be uncovered by their operation.

(b) On the other hand, they could assemble at Shellal to block the road to Gaza. This was a strong position, but not so strong as Gaza, and our superiority in mounted troops would enable us to deal with it as we did successfully at Rafah and Magdhaba. Nor were the Turks strong enough to hold Shellal, and at the same time to prepare the defences of Gaza adequately, and then to hold them.

Their plan, therefore, was to remain in a central position south of the Wadi Hesi and to await developments with detachments covering their front at Gaza, Sheria, Hureira and Beersheba.

(ii) Open to us were (a) to remain in our present position, or (b) to continue our offensive operations.

With reference to (a), we were now at El Arish and we were covering the line of approach by which the Turks could reach Egypt with a big force. Therefore, we were making use of our available troops in the most effective and economical manner. We had adequate troops also for the defence of our lines of communications, and of the Canal.

(b) On the other hand, a success was needed to raise the *morale* of the nation. Our advance had so far been successfully carried out. We had superior numbers at El Arish to any that the enemy could at this time bring against us. The Turk, if he concentrated all his troops in the vicinity exclusive of Hedjaz, might be able to oppose us with 25,000 men. This concentration would take time, and we should be able to reach Gaza before it was complete. This would give us a considerable advantage. As it was important for us to make our defence as active as possible compatible with the security of Egypt, it would be best to engage the enemy's forces while we had a local superiority.

We could then, by a *coup de main*, capture Rafah and Gaza, the frontier fortress of Palestine on the south, before these places could be made very strong, and while there was still in each case an open flank round which we could use our great superiority in cavalry to the best advantage. Since their defeat, the Turks had not taken the initiative against us. It was advisable, therefore, to continue to take the offensive to gain such an important point as the fortress of Gaza while their *morale* was low.

*Plan.* Our plan, therefore, was to advance by the coastal route and to seize Rafah and then Gaza on the same principle, but on a larger scale, as had been so successfully carried out in the capture of Magdhaba and its detachment. Once we had secured Gaza we should cause the Turks to evacuate Southern Palestine, as we should be behind their base at Beersheba.

These operations were to be carried out as soon as forward supply depots could be filled up, and camel and horse-transport trains could be organized.

Rafah was actually captured on January 9th. The first battle of Gaza started on March 26th, the second Gaza battle ended on April 19th. Yet, though we were checked at Gaza, our offensive operations had enabled us to drive the Turks out of Egypt and to attain our original objective, namely, the security of the Suez Canal.

## CHAPTER II.

### DIARY OF EVENTS.

1914.

*October 30th.*—Turkey declared war on Great Britain. The VIII Turkish Army Corps (three divisions), with some troops of the XII Army Corps as well as some third-line and depot troops, were in Syria. We had the 9th Indian Brigade available as the Canal defence troops. The Egyptian Army of approximately 22,000 men was employed for the most part in the Sudan.

*November 16th.*—General Maxwell landed at Suez and took command of the force in Egypt.

"The months of November, December and January were devoted to a systematic development of the naturally strong line of defence afforded by the Canal. A number of defensive posts were prepared on the east bank to cover the more important ferries and provide facilities for local counter-attack. Trenches were dug on the west bank to cover the intervals between posts and frustrate attempts at crossing. Communications were improved by the construction of landing-stages and removable pontoon bridges for use at important points.

"A flotilla of armed launches, manned by the Royal Navy, was organized for canal patrols. A complete system of telegraph, telephone, and wireless communications was installed, linking up all the posts with headquarters. A system of defence was established for the protection of the railway, the telegraph lines and the sweet water canal." (Despatches.)

*November 20th.*—A patrol of the Bikanir Camel Corps, consisting of 1 officer and 20 other ranks, encountered 200 Turks and Bedouins near Bir-en-Nuss, twenty miles east-north-east of Qantara. Our patrol inflicted sixty casualties on the enemy before withdrawing.

*December 17th.*—Egypt was formally proclaimed a British Protectorate. Khedive Abbas II was deposed, a British High Commissioner was appointed. The British cruiser *Doris* bombarded and destroyed four bridges on the road and railway between Alexandretta and Payaz.

*December 18th.*—Landing party from H.M.S. *Doris*

dispersed Turkish troops near the Dort-Yol railway bridge, and blew up this bridge.

*December 31st.*—By this date, the 10th and 11th Indian Divisions, as well as the 42nd East Lancashire Division and Australian and New Zealand troops, had arrived in Egypt, bringing the total numbers up to 70,000. For an attack on Egypt, the Turks had approximately six divisions in South and Central Syria. Of this force, about 15,000 were to be available to make the first crossing of the Sinai Desert. They had by this time formed advanced depots at Khan Yunis, El Arish, El Auja, and Kossaima.

### 1915.

*January 15th.*—The Turks reinforced their troops in Sinai at El Arish, Kossaima and Nekhl.

*January 18th.*—A hydroplane located a force of about 8,000 men at Beersheba.

*January 22nd.*—Turkish forces were located at Harab and at Ain Sadr. Our mounted patrols were in contact with enemy patrols near Dueidar.

Our trenches on the west bank of the Canal were manned by small detachments.

*January 26th.*—Turkish parties, each about 2,500 strong, were located respectively at Mabeuik, Moiya Harab and Mukhsheib. Farther north our covering troops near Qantara were engaged with the enemy.

In each of our sections the numbers in the trenches on the west side of the Canal were reinforced from local reserves. Two battalions, 32nd Brigade, were sent up to occupy trenches in the vicinity of Ballah.

Two New Zealand battalions reinforced the posts at Kubri, while the remainder of this New Zealand Brigade became a reserve at Ismailia.

Four cruisers took up their stations in the Canal to support the posts at Qantara, Ballah, Shatt and Shallufa respectively.

*January 27th.*—The Turks were reinforced in their positions five miles east of Qantara covering Bir Hedeua. They made unsuccessful attacks, about 0300 hours, on our posts near and at Kubri.

*January 28th.*—Our outposts at Qantara were attacked, the enemy was easily repulsed. One battalion was sent from the Reserve to the Serapeum post.

*January 29th.*—The enemy advanced towards the Canal, their largest concentration being east of Serapeum.

*January 31st.*—One Egyptian battery was sent to Tussum.

*February 1st.*—Local reserves reinforced our posts at and near Ismailia Ferry Post. There were now in this section three companies in reserve at Serapeum. On the west bank, from the entrance to Lake Timsah to Deversoir inclusive, were twelve posts, each held by two platoons, each on a front of 600 yards. On the east bank were three half-battalion posts at Tussum, Serapeum and Deversoir. Our patrols were in touch with the Turks on a twenty-mile front, from the vicinity of Serapeum to Ferdan. Approximately 12,000 Turks had been located, namely, approximately 5,000 east of Serapeum, 5,000 east of Ismailia Ferry, and 2,000 east of Qantara.

*February 2nd.*—At Ismailia Ferry Post and at Kubri there was some sniping until 1530 hours. The Turks entrenched, and brought their pontoons up to within two and a half miles of our defences. Their numbers on our front in the vicinity of Ferdan, Tussum and Serapeum were increased during the day.

*February 3rd.*—The Turks attacked at Qantara, Ferdan and Ismailia, making their main assault at Tussum, where they meant to cross the Canal. Their attack at this point was pressed at 0930 hours to within three-quarters of a mile of our positions.

We made a counter-attack from Serapeum, and captured 7 officers and 280 men. The Turks, after shelling our positions, retired at 1400 hours.

Similarly, after shelling at Ferdan and Qantara, they withdrew.

At Qantara, they attacked our outposts, and later endeavoured to advance, but without success. The enemy's forces on our front on the whole Canal were estimated at from 12,000 to 15,000 men, with nine batteries and two 6-inch howitzers. Their attacks against our southern section did not materialize. The Turks withdrew after firing at our posts at Kubri.

Throughout the day, five cruisers, torpedo boats and armed launches co-operated with fire in supporting the defenders of the Canal. The Turks engaged in this raid appear to have been parts of the 29th Cavalry Regiment, and of the 10th, 23rd and 25th Divisions, with two 6-inch howitzers and nine field batteries.

*February 4th.*—The Turks sniped our post near Tussum. Two companies were sent to clear the east bank in this area; later, when they were reinforced by three more companies, they were able to capture 6 officers and 292 men. At mid-day the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, two infantry battalions

and an Indian mountain battery advanced east from Ismailia. They met about four Turkish regiments seven miles east of Tussum, and captured 25 prisoners and 90 camels before returning.

Our difficulties of making a counter-attack on a large scale were that a large force of cavalry was not available and concentrated early on this morning, nor were there any means of supplying a large force with water and supplies at a distance from the Canal.

*February 5th.*—Enemy main forces retired at Qatiya. Formed bodies of the enemy remained about Gebel Murr, Gebel Habeita, and Mabeuk. Ship traffic on the Suez Canal was reopened by day.

*February 6th.*—Enemy were only in force on our front near Gebel Habeita.

*February 7th.*—The main forces of the enemy were now forty-five miles east of Qatiya.

*February 9th.*—Small parties of the enemy were about forty miles east of the Canal in the vicinity of Moiya Harab.

*February 10th.*—The last of the enemy retired from the Rigm area to the vicinity of Nekhl and El Arish.

*February 12th.*—Half a battalion embarked at Suez for Tor, 140 miles south-east of Suez, to reinforce the Egyptian garrison there. Night traffic on the Suez Canal was reopened.

The Turks had now failed in their object. They had not been able to block the Suez Canal, and they had raised no revolt in Egypt. However, it made us realize the possible approaches across the Sinai Peninsula and its water resources, as well as the necessity for active defence, also our lack of preparation to counter-attack or pursue the enemy owing to deficiency in transport suitable for the desert.

*February 13th.*—The enemy in the vicinity of Tor were attacked and defeated.

*February 23rd.*—Enemy encampment was located at Nekhl, also Turkish troops were seen at Bir Hassana.

*February 24th.*—A French cruiser landed men at Aqaba, and drove Turkish posts inland.

*March 2nd.*—The 3rd Australian Infantry Brigade sailed for Lemnos from Egypt.

*March 8th.*—The 30th Indian Brigade was ordered to Basra.

*March 18th.*—Unsuccessful naval attacks were made on the Narrows.

*March 22nd.*—A patrol of the 56th Rifles ran into a party

of about 400 Turks two miles south of Kubri Post. Shallufa, ten miles north of Suez, was attacked during the night.

*March 23rd.*—A column, consisting of two and a half battalions, a battery and a Camel Corps detachment, left Kubri Post at daylight.

The Turks encountered nine miles east of this post were routed. The 30th Brigade left Egypt for the Persian Gulf.

*March 27th.*—Royal Naval Division arrived at Port Said.

*March 29th.*—The 29th Division began to arrive at Alexandria.

*April 8th.*—A Turkish patrol laid a mine in the Canal near Qantara. Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade made a reconnaissance east of the Canal, but was not able to get into touch with the enemy.

*April 25th.*—Our landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula took place.

*April 27th.*—The 29th Indian Brigade left for Helles.

*April 28th.*—A patrol of the Bikanir Camel Corps met about 200 Turks with guns twelve miles east of the Ismailia Ferry Post. There was an indecisive action. The enemy withdrew to their camp at Hawawish, thirteen miles north-east of Ismailia.

A column, consisting of eight squadrons, one section Egyptian artillery, and half a battalion, left Ismailia after dark to surprise the Turks at Hawawish.

The Turks, however, after making a raid on a Canal post, retired during the night to Mahadat.

*April 29th.*—By 1400 hours, our cavalry engaged enemy rearguards, and pursued them to Bada.

*May 1st.*—Half a battalion was sent by steamer to Abu Zenima, seventy-five miles south-east of Suez, to reinforce the Egyptian garrison at that place. No enemy were, however, encountered.

*May 19th.*—A party of German and Turkish officers with guns, machine guns and rifles landed west of Sollum.

*May 29th.*—A small party of Turks reached the Little Bitter Lake. Italy joined in the war as our ally.

*May 30th.*—During the night, some Turks brought a mine to the vicinity of the Canal between Ferdan and Ballah. The mine was discovered and brought in.

*June 2nd.*—Small parties opened fire on our posts at Qantara and Ferdan.

*June 3rd.*—Our troops sent out from Qantara and Ferdan



were unable to capture Turkish raiders, only one Turkish officer being taken prisoner.

*June 12th.*—A column sent out from Kubri to the vicinity of Mabeuk encountered none of the enemy, who were reported to be withdrawing to Nekhl.

*June 15th.*—Small parties of the enemy near Qatiya were reported to be retiring on El Arish.

*June 30th.*—Our steamship *Terésias* struck a mine near the south end of the Little Bitter Lake. The Canal was blocked for fourteen hours.

*July.*—The Senussi Arab tribe in the Western Desert were found to be in league with the Turks.

The 28th Indian Brigade, with two Horse Artillery batteries, were sent, on the 13th, to Aden to deal with Turks who had made an attack on Perim Island. The attitude of the Sultan of Darfur became hostile.

*August.*—The final offensive at Gallipoli took place. This was after the landing at Suvla Bay on the 6th. The main problem now was the reinforcing from Egypt of the troops fighting in Gallipoli. Arrangements were made to use Mudros as a base instead of Alexandria. In Egypt a few of the enemy swam across the Canal on the 13th and laid a dynamite charge on the railway north of Qantara.

*September.*—Bulgaria mobilized and threatened Servia. Britain and France agreed to support Greece with 150,000 men at Salonika.

*October.*—Arrangements were continued for the support of the Greeks, in spite of their pro-German policy, due to Court influence.

*November.*—On the 23rd, a squadron of the Mysore Lancers, when carrying out a reconnaissance fifteen miles east of Qantara, encountered a party of about 200 Turks, whom they pursued for seven miles. The Senussi became hostile. The crews of two of our submarines torpedoed by the Germans were, on landing in Cyrenaica, taken prisoners by the Senussi.

On the night of 14th/15th, Senussi regulars sniped our camp at Sollum and attacked Egyptian sentries there. Posts fifty and thirty miles east of Sollum were attacked on the 17th and 20th respectively.

In the Bahariya Province also there was much unrest among the Arabs. It was, therefore, decided "to withdraw the Western Frontier posts to Mersa Matruh, and to concentrate at that place a force sufficient to deal swiftly with a situation; to secure the Alexandria-Dabaa railway; to occupy the Wadi Natrun and the Faiyum as measures of precaution; and to

watch closely by constant and careful reconnaissance the Oasis of Maghara."\* On the 20th, a composite force, consisting of a yeomanry brigade and an infantry brigade, was formed. Sollum, Sidi Barrani and Baqbaq, 100 miles west of Matruh, were evacuated. Over 130 Egyptian coastguards deserted to the Senussi.

*December.*—Senussi detachments began to assemble near Mersa Matruh.

By the 10th, our composite brigade was assembled at Mersa Matruh. Between the 11th and 15th a column, consisting of a Yeomanry regiment, one section Horse Artillery, 15th Sikhs, less two companies, and six armoured cars, cleared the enemy from the Wadi Senab and Sahifa and from Ras Manaa. The enemy in the vicinity were estimated at from 1,000 to 1,500 Senussi with two guns. Our losses were 6 officers and 50 other ranks. The Senussi lost at least 250. Our posts at Jerab, Baggush and Jerawla were withdrawn.

Between the 21st and 28th, the garrison at Matruh was reinforced by a battalion, a battery and two naval 4-inch guns. Five thousand Senussi with four guns were reported to be concentrating eight miles west of Matruh. Before daylight on the 25th, one column, consisting of six battalions, a yeomanry regiment, and a section of Horse Artillery, was sent to advance south-west towards Gebel Medwa, while another column, consisting of two sections Horse Artillery, five squadrons and a mounted machine-gun section, made a turning movement to the south to cut off the enemy's retreat to the west.

By 1415 hours, the Wadi Majid had been cleared after one and a half-hours' fighting, and we had taken 82 prisoners and killed 370. Our casualties were 64.

The Senussi retired to Unjeila and Bir Tunis: our column returned to Matruh.

Between the 28th and 30th, a column visited Jerawla, twelve miles south-east of Matruh, and destroyed the enemy's grain and tents, and brought in their camels and sheep.

## 1916.

*January 13th.*—A column, consisting of six squadrons cavalry, machine-gun section, and four companies, started to march to Baggush *en route* to Gebel Howimil (thirty-five miles south-east of Matruh).

*January 16th.*—This column returned with 13 prisoners and 190 animals.

\* Despatches, March 1st, 1916.

*January 19th.*—350 tents were reported to be twenty-five miles south-west of Matruh.

*January 22nd.*—Our column, consisting of six squadrons, two sections of artillery, and four battalions, reached Bir Shola on the way to Halazin.

*January 23rd.*—Action at Halazin against four Senussi battalions with four guns. Our force was divided into two columns and advanced on Halazin. The infantry column drove the enemy from their entrenched camp by 1445 hours. The cavalry were too exhausted, however, for serious pursuit. Our casualties were 312; the enemy's were about 700.

*January 24th.*—The column marched back to Bir Shola.

*January 25th.*—The column reached Matruh.

*February 9th.*—Plans were now made to reoccupy Sollum. It was possible either to attack at Barrani, and simultaneously to land a force at Sollum by sea or to march and to arrange for naval co-operation. On the one hand, the land route was waterless, but, on the other hand, Sollum Bay is overlooked by heights, and the operation would be slow, as it would be necessary to remove the mines at the entrance to the harbour when bringing the troops into it.

*February 11th.*—About 500 of the enemy occupied the Bahariya Oasis, 200 miles south-west of Cairo.

*February 16th.*—An advanced depot was formed at Unjeila. The Russian Army entered Erzerum and heavily defeated the Turkish Army.

*February 20th.*—A column, consisting of three battalions, four squadrons, and four guns, was sent towards a village on the coast, eighty miles west of Matruh.

*February 21st.*—Enemy were located at Agagiya, sixty-five miles west of Matruh.

*February 24th.*—Our column reached the Wadi Mehtila.

*February 25th.*—Jafer Pasha opened fire on our camp at 1730 hours.

*February 26th.*—Action at Agagiya. Our column attacked the Senussi, estimated at 1,600 with four guns, and drove them from their entrenched position. A cavalry charge completely routed them. Jafer Pasha, 39 men and 60 camels were captured.

*February 28th.*—Barrani was occupied. The enemy retreated to Bir Warr and Msead.

The southerly oases of Farafra and Dakhla were occupied by the enemy. The defences of the southern provinces were

now organized. A system of patrols was arranged from the Faiyum to Assiut. A small mobile column was ready for action at Beni Suef.

*March 4th.*—The Navy had been able to establish a supply depot at Barrani.

*March 7th.*—Headquarters of the Western Desert Force were established at Barrani.

*March 9th.*—The infantry column left Barrani *en route* for Sollum via the inland plateau near the Nagb Medean.

*March 11th.*—The mounted column, consisting of the 2nd Mounted Brigade, artillery and Camel Corps, left Barrani with orders to join up with the infantry column on the 13th. The infantry column reached Baqbaq. The mounted column reached Alem Abu Sheiba.

*March 12th.*—General Lukin reached Augerin and seized the Median and Eragib Passes.

*March 14th.*—Sollum was retaken.

*March 17th.*—An armoured-car detachment found the camp, in which ninety-five men of the crew of H.M.S. *Tara*, torpedoed in November, were imprisoned.

The armoured-car detachment covered 240 miles in twenty-four hours, and brought back forty survivors of the crew.

"The prestige lost through the evacuation of Sollum had been more than recovered."\*

*March 19th.*—Sir John Maxwell handed over his command to General Murray. The Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and the force in Egypt became now the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

The Turkish forces available for an attack against Egypt were now considerably reduced, owing to reinforcements being drawn from Syria to meet the Russian advance in Armenia and to withstand the troops that had captured Trebizond and Erzerum on February 16th, and defeated Turkish troops there.

"The Senussi forces, spread over the whole Western desert, did not exceed 3,000. The chief dangers, therefore, were enemy raids upon the Nile Valley, the stirring up of native tribes inclined to be well disposed towards the Senussi, and the creation of unrest in the Nile Valley and Delta among disaffected or nervous elements of the population."

Six divisions were sent to France, Salonika or Mesopotamia before the end of March.

*April 7th.*—A detachment of four armoured cars and a

\* Despatches dated April 9th, 1916.

machine-gun section made a successful raid from Sollum on an ammunition depot eighteen miles north-west of Sollum.

*April 9th.*—Worcester Yeomanry reconnoitred to Bir el Abd (fifteen miles east of Qatiya).

*April 11th.*—A motor-car detachment captured rifles and ammunition twenty miles west of Sollum.

*April 15th.*—The 2nd Australian and New Zealand Corps carried out a reconnaissance to Jifjafa, fifty-two miles east of Serapeum.

The Kharga Oasis was occupied.

*April 20th.*—Our patrol from Bir Mabeuik engaged an enemy patrol, fifty strong, eighteen miles west-south-west of Suez.

*April 23rd.*—The Turks, estimated at 3,650 men, six guns and six companies of camelry, made a sudden raid in force upon Qatiya and our post at Oghratina. Both these places, with their garrisons, were taken by the enemy. Three and a half squadrons and details were lost at Qatiya. A raid by about 1,000 Turks against Dueidar failed.

*April 25th.*—R.F.C. attacked enemy forces at Bir el Abd and Bir Bayud.

*April 27th.*—The Moghara Oasis was occupied and fortified.

*April 30th.*—A light-car patrol from Sollum discovered a concealed ammunition depot west of this place. This patrol also captured four prisoners sixty miles west of Minia during April.

*May.*—During this month, the Mahamdiyah-Romani district was occupied. At Romani a strong position was constructed, with its left running north to the sea.

*May 16th.*—The 2nd Light Horse Brigade made a reconnaissance to Hod el Bayud, fifteen miles east-south-east of Qatiya. Here they destroyed an enemy's camp and captured one prisoner, 36 camels and much ammunition.

*May 18th.*—A successful bombardment of El Arish was carried out from the sea and the air.

*May 22nd.*—A force of eight Sudanese companies, eight guns and fourteen Maxims successfully engaged the Sultan of Darfur's forces, 3,600 strong, at Beringia.

*May 23rd.*—On the Western Desert front, four blockhouses were occupied along the Darb el Rubi to Samalut on the Nile. Reconnaissances were carried out eighty miles west of this latter place. The area between Sollum and Barrani was cleared of Bedouins.

*June 10th.*—A column of Australian Light Horse with R.E. and Bikanir Camel Corps began to drain away the water in the Wadi um Mukhsheib. This was completed in four days.

*June 18th.*—The R.F.C. successfully bombed El Arish aerodrome.

*June 21st.*—An Australian Light Horse Brigade reconnoitred the Hods at El Geeila, El Dhaurinin, and El Mushalfat.

*June 25th.*—A detachment of armoured cars carried out a raid from Sollum towards Muhafzia near the mouth of the Wadi Sanal. Three prisoners were taken, and six Arabs were killed.

*July 9th.*—Reconnaissance undertaken to Salmana reported the country clear of the enemy.

*July 18th.*—Our patrol came into touch with fifteen Turks in the Dueidar area.

*July 19th.*—R.F.C. reported about 8,000 of the enemy on the line Abd Bir Jameil, Bir Bayud.

*July 20th.*—It was reported that Oghratina was strongly held by the enemy, and about 3,000 Turks of the 3rd Turkish Division, with eight machine-gun companies, were at Mageibra.

Bir el Abd, with a garrison of 1,000 men, was being formed into an advanced Turkish base.

*July 24th.*—Enemy had about 5,000 men in entrenched positions between Hod en Negilat and Hod el Masia.

*July 27th.*—During the night, the Turks advanced to a position between Sabket-el-Amya and Abu Darem.

*July 28th.*—A mobile column was formed for operations near Mageibra and Bayud.

*August 2nd.*—The Turks' positions were located between Mahamdiyeh and Romani to Katib Gannit Hill and Etmaler. On this day, they reconnoitred in force towards Qatiya and Hamisah.

*August 3rd.*—The Turks occupied a forward position west of Hill 110 and Rabah. During the night the enemy between Katib Gannit and Hod el Enna attacked our outpost line, which was forced to withdraw.

*August 4th.*—Battle of Romani.

By daylight, the Turks, about 18,000 strong with thirty guns, were attacking our position from the east towards Romani, and at the same time were endeavouring to make an outflanking movement on the south towards Mount Royston. The Turks reached a line from Bir Abu Diyuk

along the southern slopes of Wellington Ridge and Katib Gannit.

By 1830 hours, by a counter-attack, we regained Mount Royston and part of Wellington Ridge.

*August 5th.*—At daybreak, the whole of Wellington Ridge was recaptured. The Australian Light Horse advanced towards Qatiya when our infantry had occupied Bir Abu Hamra.

*August 6th.*—The Turks retired from Qatiya to a position between Hod el Dhaba and Hod el Reshafat. Our Camel Corps detachment reached Mageibra.

*August 7th.*—The enemy retired to a line from Hod el Masia to Oghratina. Our mobile column, by driving the enemy out of successive positions near Hod el Muhammam, caused the Turks to withdraw.

*August 8th.*—The Turks withdrew a further eight miles in an easterly direction to a position covering Bir el Abd.

*August 9th.*—Our mobile column occupied Bayud, and continued to operate against the enemy's southern flank. The Turks maintained their positions covering Bir el Abd.

*August 12th.*—The enemy vacated Bir el Abd, withdrawing towards El Arish. We had a rearguard action near Salmana. Our pursuit was now discontinued. The infantry returned to Mahamdiyeh and Romani. The cavalry and mobile column remained at Bir el Abd, Homossia, and Mageibra. We had captured about 4,000 prisoners, 4 guns and 9 machine guns, and inflicted 5,000 casualties on the Turks. Our casualties were 1,130.

*August 31st.*—On the Western Desert front in the Kharga Oasis, our motor-car patrol captured an enemy camel convoy, with its escort of thirty Arabs, twenty-nine miles north-west of Jaghbub.

*September 14th.*—A reconnaissance in force was started from Kubri to Bir el Tawal.

*September 16th.*—A force, consisting of Australian Light Horse, Imperial Camel Corps, horse and mountain batteries, started a reconnaissance towards Bir el Mazar (twenty-seven miles west of El Arish).

*September 17th.*—This force attacked the Turks' camp at Bir el Mazar and occupied many of the enemy's original first-line trenches, and captured 1 officer and 13 men before withdrawing.

*September 18th.*—The Turks began to withdraw towards El Arish.



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*September 21st.*—On the Western Desert front in the Wadi Natrun section, a motor-car patrol captured a convoy between Bahari and Amria.

The reconnoitring force from Kubri returned after capturing all the enemy's stores from their vacated camp at Bir el Tawal.

*October 9th.*—Sayed Ahmed left Bahariya for Siwa. Small mobile columns were sent to the Bahariya and Dakhla Oases.

*October 13th.*—A force, consisting of Australian Light Horse, Yeomanry and Camel Corps, began to reconnoitre towards Gebel el Makwa and Maghara, sixty-five miles east of the Canal.

*October 15th.*—Our force attacked and dislodged the enemy from his advanced positions on the Maghara Hills, and withdrew without interference on the part of the enemy.

*October 17th.*—Our reconnoitring force returned to Bayud. On the Western Desert front, the Imperial Camel Corps captured the Harra Wells, and our light-car patrol occupied Tenida in the Dakhla Oasis.

*October 18th.*—The troops on the Canal and in Sinai were now under one Commander, as Eastern Force, with headquarters at Ismailia.

*October 30th.*—The railway running east from Qantara was at Bir Salmana; railhead was covered by mounted troops.

*November 6th.*—Our force of 150 rifles and one mountain gun engaged and routed the forces of the Sultan of Darfur at Giuba.

*November 11th.*—R.F.C. bombed Bir Saba and Magdhaba.

*November 17th.*—Mounted troops reconnoitred to within eight miles of El Arish, and located enemy posts at Ujret el Zol.

*November 19th.*—R.F.C. bombed enemy camp at Masaid. Our Camel Corps detachment reached Bir Sheikh Mohammed and captured 40 prisoners. Farafra, on the western front, was entered.

*November 28th.*—Mounted patrols reached Bir el Masmi, three miles south-west of El Arish.

*November 30th.*—Bahariya Oasis had now been cleared of the enemy.

*December 1st.*—The railway was now just east of Mazar. The enemy was located at El Arish and Masaid covering all the available water supply in the area.

*December 9th.*—The Turks at El Arish were estimated to be 1,600 infantry in strongly entrenched positions.

*December 14th.*—Enemy camps at Magdhaba and Abu Aweigla were reported to have been increased.

*December 20th.*—Pipe line conveying Nile water reached the desert column west of El Arish.

During the night, Australian and New Zealand mounted troops and Camel Corps marched on El Arish, supported by the 53rd Division.

*December 21st.*—Soon after sunrise, mounted patrols found El Arish unoccupied. R.F.C. reported that 1,600 Turks were marching towards Magdhaba and Abu Aweigla, and that Maghara had been vacated. Our troops occupied El Arish.

*December 22nd.*—The 53rd Division reached El Arish and Bittia. The Turks began to prepare a system of well-constructed positions at Magdhaba on both banks of the Wadi El Arish.

*December 23rd.*—The Turks at Magdhaba were surrounded and 1,280 of their 27th Division, with four guns, were captured by the Australian and New Zealand troops and the Imperial Camel Brigade. Our casualties were 12 officers and 134 other ranks.

*December 27th.*—R.F.C. reported that the Turks were preparing an entrenched position at Magruntein, near Rafah, and that it was occupied by two battalions with mountain guns.

Turkish rearguards had by this date evacuated Maghara, Hassana and Nekhl.

During the past year, our advance had depended on the construction of the railway and pipe line, which had accompanied our advance through Sinai. The railway line was standard gauge, and was constructed at the rate of twenty miles a month. The water for the troops was brought through pipe lines, 6 inches, 8 inches and 12 inches in diameter, which followed the railway and was pumped by a series of pumps from the Nile.

From railhead, the water was carried to the troops by camels. Each could carry two 12½-gallon tanks.

Later in the following year, a Camel Transport Corps of 35,000 camels was formed, also four companies each of 2,000 donkeys. The Egyptian Labour Corps for work on the railway was increased to 55,000 labourers.

1917.

*January 7th.*—The Commander-in-Chief gave orders for the capture of the Turks reported to be at Magruntein in a strong position dominated by a redoubt 2,000 yards south-west of Rafah.

*January 9th.*—A force of Australian and New Zealand mounted troops and Imperial Camel Corps captured Rafah by 1100 hours. By 1645 hours, the redoubt south-west of the village had been occupied and 1,600 prisoners, 4 guns and 6 machine guns were captured.

*January 10th.*—Information was received that the Turks were concentrating near Shellal and were covering this place with strong works near Weli Sheikh Nuran. Five thousand Turks were being sent to Gaza.

*January 29th.*—On the western front, three light armoured batteries and three light-car patrols were concentrated at Mersa Matruh.

*January 31st.*—Our light-car column reached an assembly position 185 miles from Matruh.

*February.*—Railway construction was continued, and the position at El Arish was strengthened.

*February 3rd.*—On the Western Desert, our light-car column reached the pass north-east of Girba. The Senussi, 850 strong, were completely surprised, and retired to the cliffs west of their camp.

*February 4th.*—Senussi vacated their position.

*February 5th.*—Our column entered Siwa unopposed, and a column which started from El Arish reached Hassana. Two columns which started from Serapeum and Suez respectively reached Nekhl. Both Hassana and Nekhl had recently been reoccupied. At Hassana we captured 22 Turks, and at Nekhl 11 prisoners and one gun were taken.

*February 23rd.*—New Zealand Mounted Rifles made a reconnaissance to Khan Yunis.

*February 28th.*—Khan Yunis was entered by our mounted troops. It was decided to advance by the coast, in order to cover the construction of the railway, and so as to be able to advance rapidly on Gaza before relief could arrive, as soon as the railway reached Rafah. Supply trains of camels, limbered G.S. wagons, horse and motor transport were organized to enable the troops engaged to be supplied for one day during which it was necessary to capture Gaza. If they were unable to carry through the operation in one day, it would be necessary to withdraw back to the Wadi Ghazze for food, water and ammunition.

*March 5th.*—Turks began to evacuate their Weli Sheikh Nuran position, and to fall back on Gaza, Sheria and Bir Saba.

*March 16th.*—In order to add to the mobility of the Desert Column, it was divided into the Imperial Mounted Division of

two mounted divisions less two brigades, and also the 53rd Division with light armoured motor batteries. The concentration of these forces was completed at Sheikh Zowaid. The 52nd Division was also at this place; the 54th Division being west of it.

The broad-gauge railway reached Rafah.

*March 25th.*—The Desert Mounted Column was concentrated at Deir el Belah, the 54th Division was at In Seirat, 52nd Division at Khan Yunis, and the Camel Corps and armoured batteries about Abassan el Kebir. Advanced H.Q. were at El Arish.

*March 26th.*—First battle of Gaza. The enemy were estimated to have in the vicinity 1,500 sabres, 16,000 rifles, and 74 guns. Our strength was 8,500 sabres, 25,000 rifles, and 92 guns. The Australian and New Zealand Division left its bivouac at 0230 hours and advanced towards Beit Durdis, arriving there by 1000 hours, followed by the Imperial Mounted Division, who reached Mendur at 0930 hours. The Imperial Camel Corps reached Mendur shortly afterwards. A thick fog at sunrise delayed operations for at least two hours.

The orders for the 53rd Division were to attack Gaza in front, and for the 54th Division to be in a supporting position on Sheikh Abbas to repel any attacks by the enemy from the east or south-east.

One infantry brigade of the 52nd Division was to take the place of the 54th Division at In Seirat. One infantry and one artillery brigade of the 54th Division were to be detached in a westerly direction to Mansura, to be able to reinforce the Desert Column. The 53rd Division began their attack at 1150 hours on a two-brigade front towards the Ali Muntar Ridge. By 1530 hours, the mounted troops had been able to enter Gaza on the north and east. By 1400 hours, the infantry attack reached a position 500 yards from Green Hill. One and a half hours later, Ali Muntar Mosque had been captured. It was not until sunset, however, that Green Hill was captured by the supporting brigade of the 54th Division.

Gaza had not yet been captured, many of the horses had not been watered for thirty-six hours, there was a gap of at least two and a half miles between the right of the 53rd Division and the left of the 54th Division. Kress von Kressenstein now used his reserves to press the attack against the Imperial Mounted Division.

Accordingly, an order was sent for the two infantry divisions to close in together. The 53rd Division was ordered to draw back its right flank and the 54th Division was ordered to

withdraw to the El Burjabye Ridge to gain touch with the remainder of the force. The mounted divisions were withdrawn during the night west of the Wadi Ghazze. We captured 837 prisoners and 2 guns at a cost of 3,960 casualties.

*March 27th.*—The Turks early occupied our vacated positions on Ali Muntar and Sheikh Abbas. Enemy counter-attacks on the right of the 54th Division were repulsed by the Imperial Camel Corps.

The position of the infantry was in a salient at the junction of the 53rd and 54th Divisions. To eliminate this, it was necessary to withdraw. Also it was not possible to maintain troops in a position so close to Gaza. Orders were, therefore, issued for the two divisions to fall back to the western side of the Wadi Ghazze covering Deir el Belah. This withdrawal was carried out during the night.

*March 28th.*—The enemy occupied the Gaza defences, but made no advance beyond them.

*March 29th.*—A defensive position was organized west of the Wadi Ghazze, and was held by the 54th, 52nd and 53rd Divisions. In this Gaza battle, our casualties had been less than 4,000. The enemy losses were estimated at nearly 3,000 and two Austrian guns were captured.

The Turks now began to strengthen and wire the Gaza defences up to the Atawineh Ridge (13,000 yards south-east of Gaza).

*April 5th.*—Railhead reached Belah, which was opened up as a depot with sea-borne supplies. The 74th Division, formed from dismounted yeomanry regiments, joined the Eastern Force.

*April 15th.*—Advanced General Headquarters were established at Khan Yunis. The plan now was for two divisions to attack towards Ali Muntar; the right division was then to envelop and attack the defences north of this hill. Our third division was to advance north with its left on the sea and its right on the road running from Belah to Gaza. The 74th Division was to remain in general reserve at In Seirat. One mounted division was to be in the vicinity of Shellal, with the object of dealing with any enemy advancing from the vicinity of Hureira, while the other division covered the right of the 54th Division.

*April 17th.*—The advance against the Turks' forward positions began at dawn. The first objectives—Sheikh Abbas, Mansura, and Kurd Hill—were captured early, with little opposition. This ground was then consolidated.

*April 19th.*—Second battle of Gaza. The enemy were

estimated at 15,000 sabres, 18,000 rifles, and 101 guns. We had 11,000 sabres, 24,000 rifles, and 170 guns.

The cavalry attacked at dawn and were able to reach the Birket es Sana Ridge. The 53rd Division then advanced towards Samson Ridge, which was taken by 1500 hours, and the 52nd Division captured Lees Hill, while the right of the 54th Division advanced towards Khirbet Sihan. By 1500 hours, our advance was definitely checked, and the enemy still had their reserves in hand. Our casualties had now been 6,400. At 1820 hours, we were forced by Turkish counter-attacks to evacuate Outpost Hill. Our line then ran from the Wadi Ghazze through El Meshrefe, Sheikh Abbas Ridge, south of Outpost Hill, through Samson Ridge to Sheikh Ajlin.

One brigade of the 74th Division was at Mansura ready to support the 52nd Division. Orders were issued for all ground gained to be held during the night. Enemy's casualties and prisoners amounted to 2,285.

*April 20th.*—Enemy's local counter-attacks were repulsed. Our attacks were not continued.

*April 21st.*—Plans for offensive operations were abandoned until reinforcements arrived.

There was position warfare now in front of Gaza from the Wadi Ghazze at Tel Jemmi on our right through Sharta and Dumb Bell Hill to Sheikh Abbas, then in a north-westerly direction by Mansura, Blazed Hill, Heart Hill, Samson Ridge, to the sea to Sheikh Ajlin.

*May.*—The enemy strengthened their positions between Hureira and Gaza.

*May 6th.*—Our line between Tel Jemmi and Sheikh Ajlin was organized into two sections.

*May 23rd.*—One brigade, Australian and New Zealand Division, Royal Horse Artillery and Imperial Camel Corps, with R.E. detachment, made a raid against working parties on the Bir Saba railway. "Thirteen miles of railway line were completely destroyed, each pair of rails being cut in the centre."\* The column was able to withdraw without difficulty.

*June.*—Trench warfare was established close to Gaza. Our cavalry patrols were active beyond the south-east part of our line on our open right flank.

*June 28th.*—General Sir Edmund Allenby assumed command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

\* Despatches.

## CHAPTER III.

### BATTLES CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE FIELD SERVICE REGULATIONS.

1. The attack by the Turks on the Suez Canal, February 1st to 10th, 1915.
2. Actions near Qatiya, April 23rd and August 4th, 1916.
3. Action at Magdhaba, December 23rd, 1916.
4. Action at Rafah, January 9th, 1917.
5. First Battle of Gaza, March 26th, 1917.
6. Second Battle of Gaza, April 19th, 1917.

1. One of the first objectives for Turkey when she joined Germany in war against the Allies was a raid across the Sinai Peninsula to interrupt the traffic on the Suez Canal and to endeavour to complicate the political situation in Egypt by raising a revolt there. The Turks were also directed to move towards Southern Persia and to start a campaign against the Russians in the Caucasus. Their raid against our troops in Egypt was organized by Djemal Pasha, who had command of two corps in Syria. He organized a force of approximately 15,000 men to make the first crossing of the Sinai Desert.

With reference to his plan, the following points must be noted from Field Service Regulations:—

In Section 5, it is stated that, in framing a plan, it is necessary to have not only "a detailed knowledge of the relative strengths, armament, training and morale of the opposing forces, and of the physical characteristics and communications of the theatre of operations, but also a careful study of the psychology of the enemy people, of their national characteristics, resources and means of existence if necessary. Secondly a plan of campaign should be calculated to overcome the enemy's power of resistance. Such a plan may involve the employment of the whole military energies of the nation."

In this we find Djemal Pasha endeavouring to carry out a raid 140 miles from his advanced base at Beersheba across a

partly mountainous, partly sandy desert against a force at least four times as strong numerically as his 15,000 men. Our force would have ample time to prepare a strong defensive position, also means of reinforcement at a threatened point and adequate artillery support from the ships in the Canal and from guns west of this formidable obstacle.

There appeared to have been no careful study by Djemal Pasha of the various points which F.S.R. urge should be carefully considered in making a plan. His lines of advance were limited for his force. There were three possible routes. Therefore we had ample time to prepare to meet his attacks by any one of these three desert tracks.

The Canal defences were organized into three sectors, namely, a southern sector, to include both Port Tewfik and Geneffe. In this sector were a brigade, a squadron, a company of the Camel Corps, a field battery, and half a company of Engineers. They would be available to deal with any enemy advancing along the southern route from Nekhl to Suez. On this route it would normally only be possible to find water in any quantity at Nekhl. The road was not fit for wheels in any part of it. The hills in this southern area of the peninsula are rough and precipitous.

Along this route Djemal Pasha, in his initial distribution, planned to send three battalions and a mountain battery. Along the central route, as it was not liable to be shelled by our ships, and as it was the one along which we might least expect to be attacked by the greatest portion of his force, he meant to make his main attack with six battalions, some heavy artillery and pontoons.

To meet this force in our central sector from Deversoir to El Ferdan, both inclusive, we had seven battalions, a brigade of field artillery, and a mountain battery, a squadron of cavalry, two and a half Camel Corps companies, and a machine-gun Camel Corps section. The third line of advance for Djemal Pasha was along the coast from El Arish through El Abd, Romani and Qatiya, where there was a camel track crossing shifting sand-dunes, in which the going was very heavy.

To meet this attack on the route leading to Qantara, our northern sector, which ran from El Ferdan, exclusive, to Port Said, inclusive, contained five battalions, a squadron of cavalry, two companies Camel Corps, two field and one mountain battery, half a company of Engineers, and an armoured train with half a company of infantry.

The Turkish column to march by the coast road consisted of two battalions of infantry, mounted troops and artillery. We had a general reserve at Moascar, namely, eight battalions (less one company), a brigade of cavalry (less three squadrons and



one troop), one mountain battery, two sections field artillery, and a cavalry brigade (less three squadrons and one troop).

In addition, from the beginning of 1915 we had ample warning of Djemal Pasha's intended attack. In view, then, of his defective plan, which could not have been a careful study of the points already quoted from F.S.R., and of his employment of only a small part of his army, it is not surprising that he was unable "to overcome his enemy's power of resistance." (F.S.R., 5 (2).)

In F.S.R., Section 35, it is stated that "it is the task of aircraft to locate the direction of the enemy's main concentrations so that the C-in-C. may receive early information of any movement likely to affect the plan of campaign."

In this case, the R.A.F. brought in information as to the progress of the advance of the Turkish columns.

By January 13th, they were reported to be at Auja and Kossaima. Two days later, small parties were reported to be at El Abd, and on the Bir Murr and Moiya Harab Roads.

On the 24th, their advanced party reached Dueidar. Two days later, we had sufficient information as to their movements to warrant the orders to the Navy for their warships to take up their allotted positions for the defence of the Canal. By January 27th, it was reported that over 9,000 Turks were within twenty-five miles of the Canal.

With reference to the actual attack, F.S.R., Section 67, states that for an attack "there must be a good tactical plan, based on the best information obtainable; there must be secrecy in preparation; surprise in delivery; and skill and vigour in execution." Djemal Pasha can have had little reliable information on which to base his plan.

Otherwise he would not have overestimated the support which he hoped to get from the Egyptian patriots, whom, he said, would rise in revolt against the British when his army appeared on the Canal. There could be no secrecy or surprise, in view of the distance to be traversed across the desert, and owing to the excellent work done by our Air Force. The only skill shown was the attempt to mislead us as to the direction of the main attack.

The Turks attacked our post at Qantara on January 28th, and on the previous day they attacked our post at Kubri. While they made these attacks on the north and on the south, they were assembling a main force to attack our centre.

As to the vigour in execution of their attack, little could be expected after their long and fatiguing march across the desert and the inadequate artillery support to their final assaults. On the night of February 2nd/3rd, they made weak attempts against our defences at Qantara, Kubri and Ferdan,

and attempted to cross the Canal between Serapeum and Tussum. Three pontoons actually got across, but it led to no result, as all the occupants were either killed or captured.

On the morning of February 3rd, they tried again to cross at Serapeum, but without success. F.S.R. 72 states that "Superiority of fire is essential to the successful conduct of the attack and artillery fire affords the most important means to this end."

When the Turks started their attacks on February 3rd against Tussum Post, their artillery was effectively dealt with by the guns of the *Hardinge* and *Requin*. They were definitely repulsed between Serapeum and Tussum owing to the cross-fire from the heavy guns of the *Requin* and *D'Entrecasteaux*. Their attacks against El Ferdan did not materialize, owing to the fire from the guns of the *Clio* silencing their artillery. At Qantara they attacked our picquets with little resolution. Here they were unsupported by artillery fire.

By 1400 hours, the Turkish guns ceased fire, and soon the whole force began to retreat by the way they had advanced, covered by rearguards. Their casualties were over 2,000. They had completely failed to carry out their objective, and their morale and prestige had suffered a heavy blow. Djemal Pasha had failed to consider carefully "the relative strength and relative readiness for action of the opposing forces and he had dissipated his forces actually allotted to the attack." Probably his one correct decision was the general retirement ordered on the evening of February 3rd. Had he renewed his attack on the 4th, his force might have been destroyed.

It is necessary now to comment on our defence of the Canal. In F.S.R. 89, we find that "The defensive battle should be fought in advance of localities, the retention of which is vital to the defender."

In this case, it was most important for us to defend the jugular vein of the British Empire, that is, the Suez Canal. It is the shortest connecting link between India, Australia and New Zealand. It was the route by which troops would reach the Western Front from these countries, and it was, therefore, an invaluable communication. It was a considerable obstacle to a force invading Egypt.

Our plan was to use this obstacle for our defence, so that when the enemy approached us we could use its western bank as cover for our riflemen supported by fire from the ships in the Canal. Although we had 30,000 men available for the actual defence of the Canal, and altogether a force of 70,000 in Egypt, we carried out a passive defence. It was seen after this attack that the passage of shipping was

obstructed by this method of defence, and, unless the Canal was defended in accordance with the above-quoted paragraph in F.S.R. farther east than its own banks, we should not be protecting this vitally important line of communication. As it was, traffic was suspended in the Canal for several nights and throughout February 3rd.

In F.S.R. 97, it is stated that "an immediate counter-attack may succeed in restoring the situation and inflicting heavy casualties on the attacking troops. If the counter-attack is to be successful, it must be delivered with rapidity and precision by troops already on the spot. It will be for the local commander, if he considers that the time for counter-attack has arrived, to carry it out at once on his own initiative with boldness and determination."

These principles enunciated for the success of a counter-attack were illustrated on February 3rd. In the early morning, three Turkish pontoons and a boat were able to cross the Canal under cover of their rifle and machine-gun fire from the eastern bank. The occupants reached a point on the western bank of the Canal between Tussum and Serapeum. The local commander of a small party of the 62nd Punjabis acted at once on his own initiative, and charged the enemy with the bayonet.

The commander of a post near the 47.6 milestone acted with similar rapidity and precision in dealing with the occupants of two boats that crossed near his post. As soon as they reached the western bank, they were at once attacked. These small parties were the only Turks who crossed the Canal, and they were all killed or captured.

Further counter-attacks were delivered east of the Canal with boldness and determination, after the Turks had delivered a dawn attack against our Tussum Post. In this area, as soon as it was seen that the Turks had gained a position in our day trenches, a counter-attack was immediately made by a party of the 92nd Punjabis from the southern flank of the port. Later, another counter-attack was made from the north and by 1530 hours the trench and all its occupants (350) were taken.

A counter-attack was also made against the Turkish force which deployed for attack against the Serapeum Post. The Turks were checked in their advance by four companies composed of Gurkhas, 2nd Rajputs and 92nd Punjabis, closely supported by the fire from our ships in the Canal.

Though their artillery continued to shell the west bank and our ships, they were not able to press their attacks, which ceased altogether at 1400 hours.

In F.S.R. 79 (7), it is stated that "a time will probably

come in every attack when the advance can only be continued by the intervention of fresh troops. The reserve should then be employed."

Djemal Pasha, however, ordered a general retirement to be carried out on the evening of the 3rd, although he had not put in his reserves. He realized that he had failed to surprise the defenders of the Canal, and that he could not with his inferior numbers hope to succeed.

"To judge the right time for changing from the defensive to the offensive is as difficult as it is important."

"Counter-offensive operations will demand the same careful preparation and co-ordination of the action of the various arms as in the case of the attack." (F.S.R.)

In this attack on the Suez Canal, our defence was passive. The difficulties, as stated, were considerable in assuming the offensive when it was discovered on the morning of February 4th that the Turks were retiring. The ferries used for taking troops across the Canal were slow and could not take many over at a time.

The floating bridge at Ismailia in the same way was not a rapid means of transporting many mounted men. The bulk of the mobile force available on the Canal for offensive action was split up among the sectors holding the defences, and it would take some time to concentrate them. It had been considered necessary to retain a large proportion of our troops in the vicinity of Cairo in case there was any local rising in sympathy with the Turkish cause. When it was seen that the local inhabitants were apathetic, and that there were no hostile demonstrations, the Yeomanry in Cairo were sent by train to Ismailia, arriving on the evening of February 4th. By this time, the Turks had been retreating for a considerable time. The need for careful preparation, which is emphasized in the F.S.R., was also brought out in the final phase of the operations, namely, the arrangements for providing water for troops who were at any distance from the Canal.

To do this it would have been necessary to organize water convoys with the available camel, mule and donkey transport, as there was no time to do this on February 3rd and 4th. The result was that, though the Turkish raid was a failure, yet they were able to retire after being in close contact with us between January 27th till February 4th, with all their artillery and baggage. Their losses were less than 10 per cent. of their infantry.

2. ACTIONS NEAR QATIYA. In F.S.R. 59, it is stated that "Detached posts may occasionally be necessary in front of or to the extreme flank of an outpost position, to guard

some spot where the enemy might collect preparatory to an attack, or which he might occupy for purposes of observation. They should be employed only in exceptional circumstances, owing to the danger of their being cut off."

In this affair at Qatiya on April 23rd, 1916, the 5th Mounted Brigade was protecting railhead, five miles west of Romani, by an isolated detachment at Qatiya, consisting of a squadron, a machine-gun detachment, and dismounted details, also there were two squadrons, less one troop, and an R.E. detachment at Oghratina. These posts were seven and a half miles apart. At Hamisah, there were three squadrons and one troop two miles south of Qatiya. Headquarters of the Brigade, consisting of one regiment, less one squadron, and one machine-gun sub-section, were at Romani.

Further detachments were at Dueidar and Hill 70, twelve and seventeen miles respectively south-west of Romani. At Dueidar were 156 rifles. At Hill 70 was one battalion.

Thus there were five unconnected posts on a front of twenty-six miles. The danger of their being cut off was exemplified on April 23rd by the fact that our posts at Oghratina and Qatiya were captured. Had the force allotted for the protection of railhead been concentrated and entrenched at Romani, protected by outposts and by a sound system of day and night patrols, it would have been disposed in accordance with our present regulations.

The importance of the following extracts from F.S.R. was also brought out:—

"The first requirement of defence in mobile warfare will be information. Defensive preparations will be based on as thorough a reconnaissance of the area as the time available permits."

At Oghratina, the first intimation of the proximity of the enemy was the sound of pumps being used at wells 500 yards from the posts. The officer who went forward to investigate found a party of Turks there. This occurred at about 0400 hours. An hour and a quarter later, the post was attacked from three sides by Turks, who were not more than 50 yards from our forward defences. The defenders maintained their position for two and a half hours, by which time they had suffered 146 casualties, and had been driven from both their defensive positions. They were then forced to surrender.

Had they pushed patrols well out in the direction by which the enemy might have advanced, they would have had warning, and they might have been able to prepare stronger defensive positions in the north, east, and south-east of their post.

The Turks were helped in their approach march by the morning sea-fog, but they appear to have gained a position

unduly close to our post before their presence in the vicinity was known by the occupants of Oghratina Post.

"To economise strength while compelling a dissipation of that of the enemy must be the constant aim of every commander."

Unfortunately, early on April 23rd, when the Turks were attacking at Oghratina and Qatiya, the commander of the 5th Mounted Brigade was making a raid on the enemy's camp at Mageibra.

He found that the Turks had left a few men behind. These he captured. The presence of his troops, however, at the points of attack would have been invaluable. As it was, when he returned to his starting-point at Hamisah, he learnt that the enemy, whom he had hoped to surprise, were attacking our isolated posts. For cavalry to carry out its duties, "mobility is an essential factor for its successful execution." By the time the Brigade Commander had returned to Hamisah he had been operating for some five hours; therefore, he was not able to make full use of the mobility of his force, as they required water, and had already covered a considerable amount of ground.

F.S.R. state that the tasks of cavalry in the attack may be summarized as: "Operations against the enemy's flanks to assist in enveloping movement."

The Brigade Commander ordered one squadron to advance to Qatiya as soon as it had been able to water from the desert wells. On arrival in the vicinity of Qatiya, the Squadron Commander carried out the above principle after he had dismounted his troops, by advancing against the Turks' northern flank in prolongation of the line of our defending troops.

The remainder of the raiding force the commander decided to take round the enemy's northern flank by Hod um Ugba, north-east of Qatiya.

This enveloping movement did not materialize, as on the way the Turks were encountered. The progress against them was slow, as the Turks' opposition increased, and by 1400 hours, as men and horses had been operating since dawn, a withdrawal was carried out to Hamisah.

Similarly, the commander of five troops and a machine-gun sub-section who had moved out from Romani marched against the northern flank of the Turks who were attacking at Qatiya.

By marching on Er Rabah, he would, on arrival, strike the northern flank of troops operating in a westerly direction towards Qatiya. This force was able to drive the Turks back to the high ground south of Hod um Ugba, when the Turks were reinforced, and gradually this enveloping move-

ment was checked and the commander was forced to fall back towards his camp at Romani.

In F.S.R. 69 (10), it is stated that "the first important factor making for success in the attack is a sound and simple general plan, the second is good co-operation between the various components of the force ordered to put the plan into effect."

Both the force from Romani and the Brigade Commander's force were operating against the Turks at the same time on the north and south of Qatiya respectively. But they were not in touch with each other, and consequently there was no co-operation by a simultaneous pressure against the two flanks of the Turks advancing against the one squadron and machine-gun sub-section at Qatiya. It was not until our southern relieving force had begun to retire about 1500 hours that our northern force saw them, and very soon after this also saw that the enemy had captured the post. A withdrawal was then made to Romani and subsequently to railhead.

As the relieving columns could not materially affect the situation, the force at Qatiya, after a gallant defence, was overwhelmed by superior numbers, only about 80 unwounded men being able to escape.

Our post at Dueidar was quite successful in maintaining its position.

F.S.R. 93 (1) states that "Infantry allotted to the defence of a defended post or locality is responsible for holding it at all costs, and for inflicting the greatest possible loss upon the enemy." In 93 (7), it is stated that "the value of a sudden and violent burst of machine-gun fire against the flanks of an enemy, who has succeeded in penetrating the defences, cannot be overestimated."

In this case there was no question of surprise at any of the six works surrounding the oasis of Dueidar. When the enemy suddenly appeared in front of our south-westerly work at Dueidar soon after 0500 hours, they were met by such accurate rifle and Lewis-gun fire that they withdrew after suffering about 20 casualties. Two hours later, their assaults were again checked by well-aimed fire.

Two companies sent from Hill 70 to reinforce the post at Dueidar engaged the enemy 200 yards from our principal post with enfilade fire. There was then excellent co-operation with the garrison of the posts at Dueidar and a squadron of Australian Light Horse and an aeroplane, which resulted in the infantry defenders of our posts being able to make a counter-attack and to drive back and pursue the Turks.

Such successes as the Turks gained were lessened by their defeat at Dueidar, their heavy casualties throughout the day,



their pursuit by the 5th Australian Light Horse, in which the Flying Corps joined, turning their retreat into a rout. Romani was after this occupied by infantry, and railhead was advanced.

A line of fortifications was constructed, with the left flank north of Mahamdiyeh on the Bay of Tina to Romani. The Anzac Mounted Division covered this front and carried out a number of successful reconnaissances with energy, resource and endurance. For the Turkish activities, El Arish was their base in Sinai.

Here during July, 1916, they began to collect, as they had decided to make their next offensive along the El Arish-Qatiya caravan route. At the same time, the Turks organized a force for operations in the Hedjaz to relieve their garrison which was besieged in Medina. Some 18,000 Turkish troops, destined for the offensive against the Egyptian Expeditionary Force covering railhead at Romani, between Hod el Enna and Mahamdiyeh on the Bay of Tina, were commanded by Kress von Kressenstein. His force consisted of the 3rd Turkish Division with eight German machine-gun companies, mountain artillery, and 4-inch, 6-inch and anti-aircraft batteries, as well as Arab camelry.

The Turkish commander reached a position between Bir el Abd and Bir el Bayud, twenty miles east of Romani, with a force of about 8,000 men by July 19th, and on the following day they were entrenched west of Um Hisha between Oghratina and Bir el Mageibra in touch with our patrols only, as the Commander-in-Chief's first plan was to carry out a deferred offensive policy.

Patrol encounters for a few days only occurred in the fifteen miles of desert between the advanced positions of the opposing forces. Later, if the enemy did not attack, the Commander-in-Chief decided to take the offensive about the middle of August.

As a preliminary to our offensive movement, a striking force on a pack basis with camel transport was formed. However, in the meantime, on the night of July 27th/28th, the Turks began to advance on their southern flank in a north-westerly direction, pivoting on their northern flank, where they were in contact with New Zealand mounted troops.

The Turks now were reinforced on the line which they entrenched running north and south through Um Ugba. By the end of July, the Turks had assembled their striking force.

The Commander-in-Chief had harassed the Turks' right flank by means of naval co-operation and the fire of their monitors, and also by R.A.F. co-operation.

By August 3rd, the Turks were established on a line just



west of the ruins of Qatiya and north-west of Hamisah, and soon after midnight they began their attack on our Romani-Mahamdiyeh line. Our left flank rested on the sea; our right flank on El Maler Hill and Katib Gannit.

Our main position was covered by troops at Hod el Enna, Mount Meredith and Wellington Ridge, where the Turkish first attack was met. The Turks' plan was to make an enveloping movement round our southern flank. They consequently pressed their attack in this area. At first they were successful, and by mid-day on August 4th the troops out on our southern flank had been pressed back to and north of Mount Royston, which is west of Katib Gannit Hill and south of Pelusium Station.

At the same time, on August 4th, the Turks made a frontal attack against our entrenched position running south from a point a mile east of Mahamdiyeh Station, supported by heavy artillery from the vicinity of Abu Hamra. By the early afternoon, the Turks reached a point one and a half miles from the railway. Their line ran from north of Royston Hill along the southern slopes of Wellington Ridge. Two mounted brigades were sent to strengthen our position on this flank. These two brigades started to make a counter-attack. They were reinforced throughout the afternoon by an infantry division. By 1830 hours, Mount Royston was recaptured.

Another division captured Wellington Ridge on the following morning, and continued the offensive until Abu Hamra was in our possession. The Turks withdrew to their former Qatiya entrenchments followed up by our mounted troops.

By August 7th, they were back in their Oghratina-Mageibra position, where their southern flank was attacked by our Mobile Column at Hod el Muhammer. On August 8th, the Turks continued their retreat to their Bir el Abd position. Here our mounted troops endeavoured to envelop their flanks.

The Turks, however, were in a strong position and were effectively supported by artillery, and we were unable to drive them back.

On August 11th, our mounted troops and Mobile Column joined together at Hod el Bayud for operations against the Turks' southern flank. There was a sharp engagement, in which the Turks lost many of their baggage camels and ammunition mules. During the night, the Turks abandoned their position and retired on El Arish.

The following sentence is taken from the October, 1916, Despatches: "The complete result of the operations in the Qatiya District was the decisive defeat of an enemy force amounting in all to some 18,000, including 15,000 rifles.

Some 4,000 prisoners, including 50 officers, were captured, and, from the number of enemy dead actually buried, it is estimated that the total number of enemy casualties amounted to about 9,000."

It was now decided to clear the Sinai Peninsula of Turks, and to occupy El Arish with a desert column, consisting of two divisions and a mounted division.

In considering the failure of this Turkish attack, the following points should be considered from F.S.R.:—

In Section 67 it is stated that "There must be a good tactical plan, based on the best information obtainable; there must be secrecy in preparation; surprise in delivery and skill and vigour in execution."

In the first place, the plan cannot be called a good tactical one. The Turks had some 18,000 men. This force cannot be considered adequate for such an ambitious plan as they tried to carry out. For envelopment, there should be superiority, not such a disparity of numbers as there was between the attackers and those immediately available in our left section of the Canal defences. Here we had about 30,000 men, namely, two divisions, six mounted brigades, and nine batteries.

Then their plan cannot have been based on the best information obtainable.

They meant to hold us in front between Katib Gannit and the sea, where we had three brigades holding this position. They meant to envelop our right flank, where our mounted troops held positions facing south parallel to the railway running between Romani and Pelusium. Here our flank extended much farther south than the Turks expected, and the result was that the body of troops intended to strike at the railway behind our right flank lost touch with the main attack, and made very slow progress in the unexpected and heavy sandhills in this area.

In F.S.R. 69 (10), we find that "the second important factor making for success in the attack is good co-operation between the various components of the force ordered to put the plan into effect." In 67 (1), it is stated: "It is essential that arrangements should be made to ensure that attacks intended to be simultaneous are so in reality. This requires close co-operation between the commanders concerned and co-ordination by higher formation."

In this case, the Turks' frontal and flank attacks were not synchronized, and so they had no direct bearing on each other, and, though their frontal attack was at first successful in gaining some ground, our counter-attack from the direction of Pelusium to Mount Royston was successful, and the Turks

were driven back in disorder on their left flank, and there was no effort by the Turks to restore the situation by the action of their reserve, or by pressing their frontal attack in order to force us to dissipate our reserves, which consisted of five battalions in the vicinity of El Maler and three brigades posted along the railway from Qantara to Pelusium.

Our F.S.R. 97 (3) states that "if the situation is favourable the employment of reserve formations for a deliberate counter-offensive will furnish the best means of defeating the enemy, or of arresting his further progress in other parts of the battle."

This was exactly what happened owing to the timely action of our reserves, whose action caused the retreat of the Turks and a loss to them of 50 per cent. of their force.

With reference to the pursuit of the retreating Turks, it must be noted that the Turks' main body was able to escape.

In F.S.R. 79 (15), it is stated that "Success must be followed up until the enemy's power is crushed."

To carry out such a pursuit it is necessary to exploit to the full the mobility of the cavalry, who should, when possible, be kept concentrated. However, when the Turks attacked, their progress north-east of Mount Royston made it necessary for one of the mounted brigades to be diverted from the original purpose of operating against the enemy's rear to that of making a frontal attack at Canterbury Hill. It was thus not possible, owing to this separation of the brigades of the mounted division, to co-ordinate fully their movements on August 5th. Also the two divisions supporting the cavalry were unable to co-operate, owing to the difficulties of water supply and the intense heat, which was most exhausting for infantry marching in the soft sand.

The result of this battle was that the Turks undertook no further offensive operations, and that they were gradually driven into Palestine.

#### MAGDHABA, DECEMBER 23RD, 1916.

In this action, the Turks held five redoubts; three were south of the Wadi El Arish and two were north of it, that is, north-west and north-east respectively of Magdhaba.

The mounted division of the Desert Column, with the Camel Corps Brigade, by daybreak were within four miles of their objective. The capture of Magdhaba was brought about by the converging movement of all available troops, covered by the fire of three batteries. The attacks were pressed with the greatest determination; the advance of the

10th Australian Light Horse Regiment was made round by Aulad Ali and Hill 345 to make an attack against the 3 and 4 Redoubts south of the Wadi, while the remaining three redoubts were simultaneously attacked.

In this case, the precepts in F.S.R. were carried out. There was secrecy in preparation, surprise in delivery, and skill and vigour in execution.

At 0100 hours on December 23rd, the Anzac Mounted Division, with their Territorial Artillery and Imperial Camel Corps Brigade, started up the Wadi El Arish, and in four hours had reached Magdhaba, their second twenty-five miles' night march in three days.

The enemy were completely surprised. For eight hours the attacks were pressed with determination on the five redoubts surrounding the objective. The crisis of the fight was the combined attack of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Regiment working up the Wadi and two companies of the Camel Brigade, who charged the No. 1 Redoubt with the bayonet and caused the surrender there of 3 officers and 92 other ranks. After this, the 'Turks' defence collapsed.

The artillery adequately carried out the rôle allotted to them in accordance with the F.S.R., namely: "Superiority of fire is essential to the successful conduct of the attack, and artillery fire affords the most important means to this end. Once movement has commenced, it must be maintained throughout every phase of the attack, and the artillery should assist the other arms to maintain their mobility and drive home the attack by every means in its power."

The H. and S. Mountain Battery finally supported the attack of the 2nd Australian Light Horse Regiment against No. 2 Redoubt south of the Wadi from a position 2,500 yards from the redoubt.

This successful operation, due to the mobility of the cavalry and their continuous maintenance of pressure on the enemy, resulted in the capture of the Turkish Commander and two battalion commanders, with 1,280 prisoners.

#### RAFAH, JANUARY 9TH, 1917.

The garrison of the entrenched works round this place was surprised after a twenty-nine-mile night march. New Zealand Mounted Rifles closed the exits from the north. The 3rd and 1st Light Horse Brigades attacked the Turkish works facing east, the Camel Brigade attacked the works facing south-east, while the 5th Mounted Brigade dealt with the redoubt on the south-west.

Troops were thus in touch with each other right round Rafah and its defences. The attack of the 5th Mounted Brigade was supported by the effective machine-gun fire of the light-car patrol at a range of 1,600 yards.

It is thus seen that definite objectives were allotted in accordance with a co-ordinated plan, as laid down in F.S.R. 68 (1): "Under all conditions the attacking troops must be given definite objectives by their immediate commanders and the principle must be remembered that higher commands allot tasks and leave the method of carrying them out to their subordinates, subject always to co-ordination by the former."

Also the duties of the machine guns in the attack were adequately carried out, as laid down in F.S.R., namely: "To cover by fire the advance of the attacking troops, through every stage in the attack and in particular to apply concentrated fire upon centres of resistance which may check the advance."

The Turks, on the other hand, were not disposed in depth, and had no reserves. Each of their four works was isolated and self-contained, and there was no central reserve. "Defensive positions, however strong, are of no value unless their defenders have the will to defend them to the last."

Our attacks were so resolutely pressed, first by the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade from the north against the redoubt south-west of Rafah. This was captured after a bayonet charge. Then by the 1st and 3rd Light Horse Brigades, but the Turks surrendered before their attacks were pushed home.

Similarly, on the southern work, which the Camel Brigade attacked, the Turks put up a white flag for the surrender of the garrison of 5 officers and 214 other ranks.

In F.S.R. 10 (4), it is stated that "The chief rôle of a commander is to make decisions."

During this engagement, about 1600 hours, the Turks' strong works were still holding out, when information was brought that enemy reinforcements, about 500 strong, were advancing from the north and north-east on Rafah on to our open flank. It was necessary then to decide whether to break off the action or not. The commander, who was in a position from which he could observe the situation himself, saw that the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade had gained a footing on Hill 255, and he decided to continue to press the attacks with all available troops and to capture the works. This was successfully done within an hour.

## FIRST BATTLE OF GAZA, MARCH 26TH, 1917.

F.S.R. 88 (3): "The position selected must be strategically important; otherwise the assailant will be under no obligation to attack it and the defender must inevitably conform to his movements."

Gaza had been called the "Gateway into the Plain of Philistia." It stands at the junction of the roads to Beersheba and to Jaffa, on a plateau, about 200 feet high, two miles inland from the sea.

It is necessary for a force operating in the coastal area, which is suitable for mobile warfare, to capture this city. Any other advance, except in the plain, for our armies would be unsuitable, as it would be in the rocky, arid foothills, or in the Judæan Hills north of Beersheba, in both of which areas our progress must be slow. In addition, it was not suitable for our armament or training. Also, had the Commander-in-Chief now abandoned the sea-coast route by which he had advanced from Qantara via El Arish and Rafah, he would be making a flank march across the Turks' front and would thus be exposing his communications. His force of three divisions and two cavalry divisions was not sufficient to guard his line of communications and to form also an adequate striking force for an offensive campaign. Also he had to cover the construction of his railway which accompanied his force. Therefore, the Turkish Commander was right to occupy this Gaza position more strongly than one at Beersheba, in accordance with the following paragraph in F.S.R. 89 (1): "When the general situation permits a commander to choose the position on which he will await the enemy's attack, his choice will be guided by various considerations which are of general application whatever the size of the forces engaged.

"The tactics and armament of the enemy, considered in conjunction with the nature of the ground, will indicate which of the considerations should carry most weight."

Gaza, in addition to being in a strategically important position, was naturally strong and had been artificially strengthened. Ali Muntar, a conical hill on the south-east of the city, dominated the town and the country in its vicinity.

From Ali Muntar due west were lines of trenches running back towards Sheikh Hassan, north-west of Gaza. Samson Ridge, a prominent feature south-west of Gaza, was not fortified, but there were heavy sand-dunes leading up to it from the south.

Round Gaza itself was a series of cultivated plots enclosed by thick, high cactus hedges. Between the Wadi Ghazze (6,000 yards at its nearest point from Gaza), the country was

open. The Turks might, therefore, expect our advance to be in this area. They might, however, have added to our difficulties and have gained more room for manœuvring local and other reserves and for making local counter-attacks if they had occupied a more forward position and more in advance of Gaza, which it was at all costs vital to them to hold, namely, on Samson Ridge, Kurd Hill, Mansura Ridge and Sheikh Abbas. This would have been in accordance with F.S.R. 89 (7); in discussing, in this paragraph, the requirements of a defensive position, it is stated that "the ground should afford facilities for local counter-attacks, by which means alone is a resilient defence made possible."

The plan for the attack on Gaza was a good tactical one based on the best information; there was also, as advocated in F.S.R. 67 (1), "secrecy in preparation and surprise in delivery."

The basis of the Commander-in-Chief's operation was to repeat the *coup de main* so successfully carried out at Rafah and Magdhaba.

At both these places, the Turkish detachments had been dealt with decisively. The plan for the capture of Gaza was equally bold and skilful, and was to be carried out on the same principle as in the last two operations, only with larger forces.

The plan was to make full use of the factor of mobility, and of our superiority in mounted troops, in order to attack Gaza and hold off Turkish reinforcements on the north with one mounted division, while the infantry attacked from the south and south-west between Ali Muntar and Samson Ridge.

It was essential to capture Gaza in one day, in order to get the water for the horses and to take advantage of our superior numbers at the decisive point, as our supply arrangements would only enable us to maintain troops at such a distance from railhead for one day. If our objective was not obtained within this time limit, it would be necessary to withdraw to the Wadi Ghazze to be within reach of water and supplies.

Our plan had been considered in accordance with F.S.R. 5 (2): "The first duty of the general staff is to appreciate the course of action, which, within the capabilities of the armed forces likely to be available for the campaign, will most rapidly influence the enemy people in the desired direction. This demands a detailed knowledge of the relative strengths, armament, training and morale of the opposing forces, and of the physical characteristics and communications of the theatre of operations."

We had gained the initial advantage of strategical surprise by the evening of March 25th, as we had concentrated three



divisions and two cavalry divisions and a camel brigade in the vicinity of Belah, Khan Yunis and In Seirat, within striking distance of the enemy, who were ignorant of the weight and direction of our intended attacks. The Turks were completely surprised when the fog lifted about 0830 hours on March 26th to discover one of our brigades on the Mansura Hills.

The Turks had at this time a force estimated at about 5,000 men in Gaza to oppose our divisions.

The details of our plan were in accordance with F.S.R. The tasks of the cavalry suggested in 74 (1) are "operations against the enemy's flanks to assist in enveloping movement; to delay the approach of hostile columns."

The cavalry were to cross the Wadi Ghazze at Sheikh Nebhan and then to advance to Mendur. One division was to operate towards Huj in a north-easterly direction, to hold off reinforcements, while the other division was to advance towards Beit Durdis and envelop the garrison of Gaza from the north. The Camel Corps Brigade was to be in reserve at Mendur. By 1000 hours, the mounted troops were in their positions. Our Regulations state that in an attack "time is of the utmost importance." In this case, we lost two precious hours of daylight owing to a dense sea-fog rolling over the country as soon as the sun rose.

F.S.R. 69 (10) states that "The first important factor making for success in the attack is a sound and simple plan, the second is good co-operation between the various components of the force ordered to put the plan into effect."

In this case, the plan was sound and simple. Our leading division was to cross the Wadi Ghazze behind the cavalry and then to advance north. One division was to follow behind and to be in support on Mansura and Sheikh Abbas. One division was to be in reserve south of the Wadi west of El Breij. These preliminary operations were carried out as arranged. The main objectives for the infantry were the hills, Ali Muntar and the Green Hill, dominating Gaza on the south-east.

With these heights in our possession, and the exits of the town on the northern side blocked, and the Turks' reinforcements held off, the climax of the attack could be awaited with every confidence.

In F.S.R. 67 (1), we find that "The climax of every attack is the entry of the infantry into the main hostile position and the annihilation of the defenders in the hand-to-hand combat which follows the entry.

"It must, therefore, be the aim of every commander so to combine the efforts of the component parts of his force

as to ensure that his infantry reach their goal in the best possible condition for engaging in the hand-to-hand combat."

By sunset, our troops were in the desired positions round Gaza with the Ali Muntar Hill in our possession. One brigade of the 52nd Division had carried Green Hill after a vigorous and determined attack excellently supported by artillery. Gaza, however, our objective, had not yet been captured, the Turkish reinforcements were pressing our mounted division on the north-east, east and south-east, their horses were urgently in want of water which must be procured either at Gaza or back in the Wadi Ghazze; there was a gap of over two miles between the 54th Division on Sheikh Abbas and the 53rd Division on Ali Muntar.

On the other hand, we still had one division in reserve. This division had not yet been engaged.

The following paragraph from F.S.R. now appears to be applicable to this situation:—

"A commander must have the means at hand to take advantage of any local success gained by his leading troops. If his force is disposed in depth, he will be able to utilize his reserves rapidly in order to develop a success. It enables the attack to be carried forward without a check, in spite of losses among the leading troops."

At sunset, however, after the day's fighting, four brigades were on the hills south and south-east of Gaza. Their eastern flank was continued by a weak line of mounted troops, two brigades of another division were still holding positions on Sheikh Abbas. The reserve division was at In Seirat and was not at hand so that it could be utilized rapidly to develop our successes on Ali Muntar and Green Hill. Unless, therefore, Gaza was taken and the water in it obtained for the mounted troops, it would be necessary for these troops to withdraw. If they withdrew, it would be dangerous to leave the infantry in their present positions, with their flank exposed and a considerable gap between the forward troops. There was a risk in continuing the attack just as it was getting dark.

The unfortunate effect of the delay caused by the fog was beginning to be felt. Had we reached our present positions only an hour earlier, the decision would have been much easier. Our risks in advancing during the hours of darkness were considerable, and these had to be weighed against the prospects of success.

The commander decided to bring back the mounted troops across the Wadi Ghazze. Then he had to dispose his forward infantry so that they were in close touch with each other.

This method of bringing the forward divisions together

was vitally important. If the 53rd Division was brought back to the 54th Division, all the high ground for which we had suffered over 4,000 casualties and for which there had been hard fighting throughout the day would be abandoned.

If, on the other hand, the 54th Division vacated Sheikh Abbas, this place in the hands of the enemy would make our position on Ali Muntar untenable.

This difficulty was solved by bringing the 53rd and 54th Divisions to a line through Sheluf facing west, and through Mansura and Burjabye facing east.

The Turks were then able to bring their guns on to Sheikh Abbas and to gain dominating positions from which to observe their fire on to our salient on the Burjabye and Sire Ridges, as well as on to our communications by which we maintained our troops in these positions.

F.S.R. states "that there should be ample room within and in rear of the position for manœuvring." This condition could not in this present case be fulfilled, as by 0930 hours it ran up to an acute salient angle south of Ali Muntar and between the two ridges of Sire and Burjabye, on which the troops were facing respectively east and west. There was not more than two miles of intervening ground at the widest. Therefore, if we were to make our position tenable, we must retake Ali Muntar and Sheikh Abbas.

We did reoccupy Ali Muntar on the 27th, but a strong Turkish counter-attack forced us to withdraw. The Turks on Sheikh Abbas were able to shell our position. Therefore, as stated in Despatches, operations had to be terminated.

"If it had now been practicable for the General Officer Commanding Eastern Force to advance with his three infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions, I have no doubt Gaza could have been taken and the Turks forced to retire, but the reorganization of the force for a deliberate attack would have taken a considerable time, the horses of the cavalry were very fatigued, and the distance of our railhead from the front line put the immediate maintenance of such a force with supplies, water and ammunition entirely out of the question. The only alternative, therefore, was to retire the infantry."

The G.O.C.-in-Chief later wrote: "The operation was most successful, and owing to the fog and waterless nature of the country round Gaza just fell short of a complete disaster to the enemy."

## SECOND BATTLE OF GAZA, APRIL 19TH, 1917.

The Turks were now disposed in "a series of defended posts and localities affording each other mutual support" [F.S.R. 99 (4)] held by thirty-four battalions and 100 guns on a sixteen-mile front between Sheria and Gaza. "Machine guns form the framework on which the infantry defence of the position is built." [F.S.R. 93 (4).]

Their position was naturally strong, and had been strengthened by a series of machine-gun nests in the cactus hedges at the Warren, the Labyrinth, Green Hill, Middlesex Hill, Outpost Hill, Lees Hill, and the Ali Muntar Ridge.

The following paragraph in F.S.R. 93 (6) was also fulfilled by their machine-gun emplacements:—

"Careful concealment and adequate cover for machine guns are essential, and alternative positions must be prepared to which guns can move to assist in the defence of certain localities, or to avoid destruction by hostile artillery fire in case their positions are discovered by the enemy's aircraft."

Their positions "offered facilities for concealing their dispositions from air and ground observation, it favoured the close co-operation of all arms, and permitted of covered movement within and in rear of the position." [*Vide* F.S.R. 89 (4).]

The form of our attack was considered with reference to the nature of the country, the tactics and armament of the enemy, the time and resources available to the enemy for the organization of his defences." [*Vide* F.S.R. 67 (2).]

As the enemy had had ample time since our last attack on March 26th to strengthen his defences, and as his normal tactics were to hold positions tenaciously once they had been entrenched, and as there was now no open flank against which our mounted troops could operate, it was decided to make a deliberate attack.

On April 17th, two divisions were to advance and capture Sheikh Abbas, Mansura, and Kurd Hill. Two divisions were to be in reserve respectively north of the Wadi Ghazze and at In Seirat. The mounted troops were employed on protective duties and in obtaining information. [*Vide* F.S.R. 14.]

This preliminary operation was successfully carried out as planned so that the attack could be undertaken on April 19th. On this day there were three forward divisions and one division in reserve.

The forward troops attacked the enemy's positions from south-east of Ali Muntar towards Ali Zowaid Trench north-east of Sheikh Ajlin.

The reserve division was in position south-west of Sheikh Abbas. The Desert Mounted Column prolonged the front of our attack by dismounted action between Birket es Sana and Atawineh to Khirbet Sihan. A proportion of mounted troops was kept in reserve to exploit success.

In F.S.R. 67, it is stated that "It is essential that arrangements should be made to ensure that attacks intended to be simultaneous are so in reality. This requires close co-operation between the commander concerned and co-ordination by the higher formation."

At 0715 hours, in accordance with a carefully co-ordinated plan, the infantry advanced to attack their allotted objectives, which had been subjected to an artillery bombardment. This was in accordance with F.S.R. 72 (II), namely, that "the volume of artillery fire should be concentrated on that portion of the front selected for the main infantry and tank attack."

The tanks were also given definite orders in accordance with F.S.R. 73 (3): "The principal duty of tanks is to assist the advance of the infantry, and, in order that they may do this efficiently and economically, they should be given definitely located centres of resistance to overcome."

One tank captured a lunette on Outpost Hill before it was unfortunately hit by the enemy's shells; another tank, before it became a casualty, inflicted heavy casualties on an enemy redoubt in the vicinity of Khirbet Sihan.

In spite of considerable opposition on our front, the left division captured its first objectives. The centre division was not able to capture Outpost Hill. This led to serious difficulties, as from this hill the Turks were able to bring enfilade fire to bear on the brigade advancing to the west of it. This caused a further check to the centre division. The left brigade of our right division in its advance beyond the centre division came under enfilade fire from Ali Muntar and was also checked.

The Imperial Camel Corps on the right of the infantry advanced up to Khirbet Sihan.

Our Regulations with reference to counter-attacks (F.S.R. 97) were exemplified by the action of the Turks. When the western flank of the left brigade of the 54th Division became exposed by being in front of our centre division, the Turks made an immediate counter-attack supported by their available artillery.

F.S.R. state that "If portions of the attacking force succeed in penetrating the defender's position, they usually become more or less disorganized owing to casualties and to the fact that they are operating on unfamiliar ground. An immediate counter-attack may succeed in restoring the

situation and inflicting heavy casualties on the attacking troops."

Such was the case when the enemy counter-attacked the right of our infantry line and against the dismounted cavalry on their right. Their counter-attacks in both cases were checked and driven back, but not before we had suffered severe casualties.

By 1500 hours, the key to the position had not yet been captured. This was in front of our centre division, where the ground was broken and difficult and strongly entrenched and held. An attack against the enemy in this area on Outpost and Middlesex Hills could only be made on a narrow front.

Until these important positions were captured, it was not possible for the 54th Division to advance without being enfiladed. The value of the enfilade fire of machine guns as advocated in F.S.R. was emphasized by this distribution and handling by the Turks of these weapons in this phase of the operations. By 1830 hours, the Turks' counter-attacks had driven us off Outpost Hill.

The position at nightfall was that, though our reserve division had not been seriously engaged, and two brigades of the 52nd Division were available for offensive action, yet our attack was not progressing; the Turks occupied the dominating height of Ali Muntar, we had suffered 6,400 casualties, and our lines now ran from Mendur in a northerly direction to Sheikh Abbas, then in a north-westerly direction through Mansura, Samson Ridge to Sheikh Ajlin.

"The original attacker may be thrown on the defensive by counter-stroke." [F.S.R. 22 (3).] This was the situation now. On April 20th, the situation gained was consolidated.

The opinion of the commander of the Desert Column was, "In view of the great strength of the positions to which he was opposed, the renewal of a direct attack with the force at his disposal would not be justified by any reasonable prospect of success."

## CHAPTER IV.

### ACTIONS IN THE WESTERN DESERT CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE FIELD SERVICE REGULATIONS.

Wadi Senab, December 11th to 13th, 1915.

Wadi Majid, December 25th, 1915.

Halazin, January 23rd, 1916.

Agagiya, February 26th, 1916.

#### WADI SENAB, DECEMBER 11TH TO 13TH, 1915.

"In mobile warfare, the results of successful envelopment are overwhelming." [F.S.R. 69 (3).]

It was necessary to take the offensive against the Senussi in the vicinity of Mersa Mutrah (180 miles west of Alexandria). Accordingly a column, consisting of a yeomanry regiment, a section of Horse Artillery, an armoured-car detachment, and the 15th Sikhs less two companies, marched out of Matruh at 0700 hours on December 11th to deal with a force of about 300 Senussi reported to be actually in the Wadi Senab.

To the commander of the cavalry, the cars and the guns was allotted the rôle of enveloping the enemy, while the infantry marched due west along the telegraph line parallel to the coast. The enemy were encountered nine miles south-west of Matruh. They were contained in their position in Wadi Senab until a squadron of Australian Light Horse came out from Matruh in the afternoon and turned their southern flank.

Their position then became untenable, and they were forced to retire, with the loss of about 90 casualties. The infantry continued their march along the coast to the wells at Umm er Rakham. On the following day, men and horses were rested.

On December 13th, a column marched from their bivouac in a westerly direction towards the Wadi Hasheifiat. The column had been reinforced by the Royal Scots less two companies; one company 15th Sikhs was left behind as a guard to the stores in the bivouac.

In F.S.R. 33 (1), it is stated that "detailed and timely information about the enemy is a necessary factor of success in war." We had not any information about the exact position of the enemy or their strength and dispositions.



Therefore, in accordance with F.S.R., careful tactical reconnaissance was required throughout these operations, as our Regulations state, "When the opposing forces are within striking distance, detailed information will be required regarding the enemy's tactical dispositions to enable commanders to make their tactical plan of operations and to guard against surprise."

Both on the 11th and 13th our troops were surprised. On the 11th, the operations started by the right flank guard of our cavalry being suddenly fired on at short range. On the 13th, our left flank guard suddenly came under heavy fire near the east bank of the Wadi Hasheifat, two miles from their bivouac.

The duties of a flank guard are similar to those of an advanced guard. Our Regulations [F.S.R. 47 (4)] state that "If a commander of the main body, owing to lack of information or other reasons, has been unable to give the advanced guard commander any definite instructions, the latter must act on his own initiative. The first necessity in such a case will generally be that of obtaining the information necessary to enable the commander of the main body to come to a decision; this will best be achieved by driving in the enemy's covering troops as soon as they are encountered. Such a step will rarely interfere with the superior commander's liberty of action, whilst hesitation and delay may do so by allowing the enemy to seize the initiative."

In this case, on the 13th, as has already been noted, there was no definite information as to the enemy's dispositions. Therefore it was necessary to obtain it, as the Regulations suggest, by driving in the enemy's first troops when they were encountered.

The commander of the force had set out on offensive operations, so this course of action would have been in accordance with the wishes of the commander. The flank guard commander, "by acting with vigour against the enemy's covering troops, and by securing tactical points in the vicinity which would assist in the development of the attack by the main body," would have helped his commander and would have prevented the enemy from gaining the initiative.

"Surprise is the most effective and powerful weapon in war," and when the Senussi opened fire at short range the left flank guard was surprised, and so the enemy then gained the initiative and were able to drive it back. The ridge in their front was an important tactical point; had this been occupied at once by our flank guard, the plans of the commander of the main body would have been facilitated.

As it was, the small body of Senussi, who had gained the

initial advantage, were quickly reinforced and they pressed their attack on to the plateau east of the ridge. The commander of the force now had to check this advance by the enemy while he decided to envelop their left flank with his cavalry.

This was finally done after much fighting. The enemy began to retreat soon after 1500 hours. Their losses were at least 250. Our own casualties had been 56, as the enemy had at first attacked with considerable vigour, and then had held their position on the ridge with such tenacity that the left flank guard had not been able to occupy it until reinforcements arrived with artillery from Umm Rakham. Then, supported by gun fire, the cavalry turning movement became effective, and we were able to regain the ridge, but too late in the day to carry out an effective pursuit.

#### WADI MAJID, DECEMBER 25TH, 1915.

"The main objects in undertaking night operations are to effect surprise and to avoid observation and hostile fire. Success in all night operations depends . . . on simplicity of plan, security from hostile air observation and attack, and on minute preparations by commanders and staffs concerned. Previous training by the troops employed is also essential."

The key to the position occupied by the Senussi was the Gebel Medwa Hill, six miles south-west of Matruh. Our approach to this position was made under cover of darkness on December 25th, and, owing to the fact that the presence of our right column was unknown to the enemy, we were able to get a footing on Gebel Medwa by 0730 hours.

Owing then to the excellent preliminary arrangements, we were well placed to continue further operations. The plan was for the right column, consisting of a regiment, a section of Horse Artillery, and six battalions, to march south-west and round the southern flank of the enemy on Gebel Medwa. The other column, composed of two sections Horse Artillery, five squadrons, and a mounted M.G. Section, was to make a wider sweep round the enemy's position about four miles west of it, in order to cut off the enemy's retreat.

The attack made by the right column to drive the enemy off their position west of the Gebel Medwa was completely successful. There was excellent artillery co-operation by the Horse Artillery section supporting the advance by observation and from the guns of H.M.S. *Clematis*. The enemy's position was accurately shelled and their gun was silenced.

"Success in the infantry attack depends in the first instance on fire which makes movement possible and then on the adoption of suitable formations, the power of leadership and

the tactical capacity possessed by commanders and finally on a sound application of the principle of co-operation." [F.S.R. 71 (1).]

As has been noted, there was adequate and accurate artillery support.

Then there was excellent co-operation between the troops making the main and the containing attacks against the enemy's left. The troops making this containing attack maintained their pressure, and prevented the enemy from reinforcing the points where the 15th Sikhs, followed by the New Zealand Rifles, were to make their attack.

The formations adopted by our troops were suitable, as advocated in our Regulations.

When the leading infantry came under fire, they opened out into artillery formation before forming up preparatory to attacking over the last 800 yards. Over this area the forward movement was steadily carried to the ridge occupied by the enemy in accordance with F.S.R. 71 (6). "The forward movement of the infantry can be ensured only by sound co-operation in the units themselves and between them and the other arms supplying covering fire."

The enemy were driven out of their position with considerable losses. Unfortunately, the cavalry column had been delayed by parties of the enemy four miles south of their main position. They were not due west of the enemy's position until 1500 hours, by which time the bulk of the enemy had escaped up the Senab and Majid Wadis.

However, the Senussi had been defeated, their *morale* had suffered considerably, and they had heavy losses in personnel, artillery, ammunition and stock.

#### HALAZIN, JANUARY 23RD, 1916.

The main principles illustrated in this action are the necessity of maintenance of the objective and the value of exploitation of success and retention of the initiation.

Our force left their camp at Bir Shola (twelve miles south-west of Matruh) at 0600 hours on January 23rd in two columns, of which one was composed of infantry with a small proportion of cavalry and guns, and the other of cavalry, horse guns and machine guns. As soon as the enemy were located in a position about seven miles south-west of Shola, the commander of the force decided to attack frontally with his infantry while his cavalry operated against the enemy's southern flank. Our infantry attack progressed in the centre, but on both flanks the enemy was aggressive.

Our troops on both flanks were driven in and had to be

reinforced before the enemy were checked. The commander of the force, however, maintained his objective and was not diverted from his purpose of pressing forward to capture the enemy's main position by these temporary successes by the enemy against his flank.

He had gained the initiative in his frontal attack, and he retained it in accordance with the following extracts from F.S.R.:—

"In selecting the portions of the front for the main attack, the commander must aim at definite tactical advantages. As a general rule, local reserves must be used to assist advanced troops who have gained success. They should not, in the first instance, be used against portions of the enemy's where resistance shows no signs of weakening."

"Having seized the initiative by launching the attack, the commander must aim at retaining it."

"Half-hearted measures never attain success in war, and lack of determination is the most fruitful source of failure. A commander who has once decided either to give or to accept battle, must act with energy, perseverance and resolution."

"Nothing tends to upset the morale of subordinate commanders and troops more than a change of plan, which may suggest vacillation on the part of the commander."

By carrying out these principles, the commander of our force was successful at the vital point in the enemy's position, and this led to success everywhere.

By 1500 hours, our frontal attacks had brought us to the main entrenchments, which the enemy now vacated, and the troops who had pressed their attacks against our flanks now joined in a general retreat. The enemy's casualties were about 700. Unfortunately, owing to lack of water for their horses, the cavalry were unable to carry out a sustained pursuit in order to turn the enemy's retreat into a rout in accordance with the following paragraph from the F.S.R.:—

"As the attack progresses and the enemy shows signs of retreating, the cavalry must be in a position to exploit the success to the full. The cavalry commander must keep in constant communication with the commander of the force, so that he may be in a position to anticipate orders and take advantage of fleeting opportunities of intervening in the battle."

AGAGIYA, FEBRUARY 26TH, 1916.

In this successful action, there was excellent co-operation. The intervention of the Dorset Yeomanry in the final phase led to the complete rout of the enemy, the capture of Jafar

Pasha, the Senussi leader, and of many prisoners, a convoy of dates and much ammunition.

By February 23rd, our force had reached a position at the mouth of the Wadi Mehtila, eight miles north-east of the enemy's position in the sandhills of Agagiya and seventy miles from Matruh.

The cavalry moved out early on February 26th and were able to gain accurate information as to the extent of the enemy's position, so that the force commander could make his plans for attack. The Senussi had occupied a suitable position organized in depth.

The distribution of their troops was designed to ensure mutual support throughout the system. (*Vide F.S.R. 92.*) They had excellent observation and a good field of fire against any enemy advancing from the north.

The commander of our force gave the cavalry clear and definite orders in accordance with the following paragraph in F.S.R. 74 (3). "When the plan for the main attack is made, the action of the cavalry must be clearly stated. If not required for protective duties on the flank, for an outflanking movement or to threaten the enemy's communications, it should be allotted one or more positions where it can best act in accordance with the plans of the commander of the force, and from which it can easily deploy."

The Dorset Yeomanry and two armoured cars in this case were directed to some sandhills on the western flank of the enemy's position. They could thus observe how the attack was progressing, and if the enemy showed signs of retreating.

Our frontal attack was started by 1100 hours on a one-battalion front, supported by another battalion. This was in accordance with F.S.R. 71 (2), namely, "The importance of organization in depth must be fully appreciated for the following reasons. It enables the attack to be carried forward without a check, in spite of losses among the leading troops. Command and control is simplified. The security of the flanks and rear is more easily assured."

Our attack was continued in spite of the fact that it was over open ground and that the Senussi made a counter-attack round our left flank. There was excellent co-operation from the artillery and machine guns to support by observation the advance and assault. "The greatest possible strength was deployed for the decisive attack."

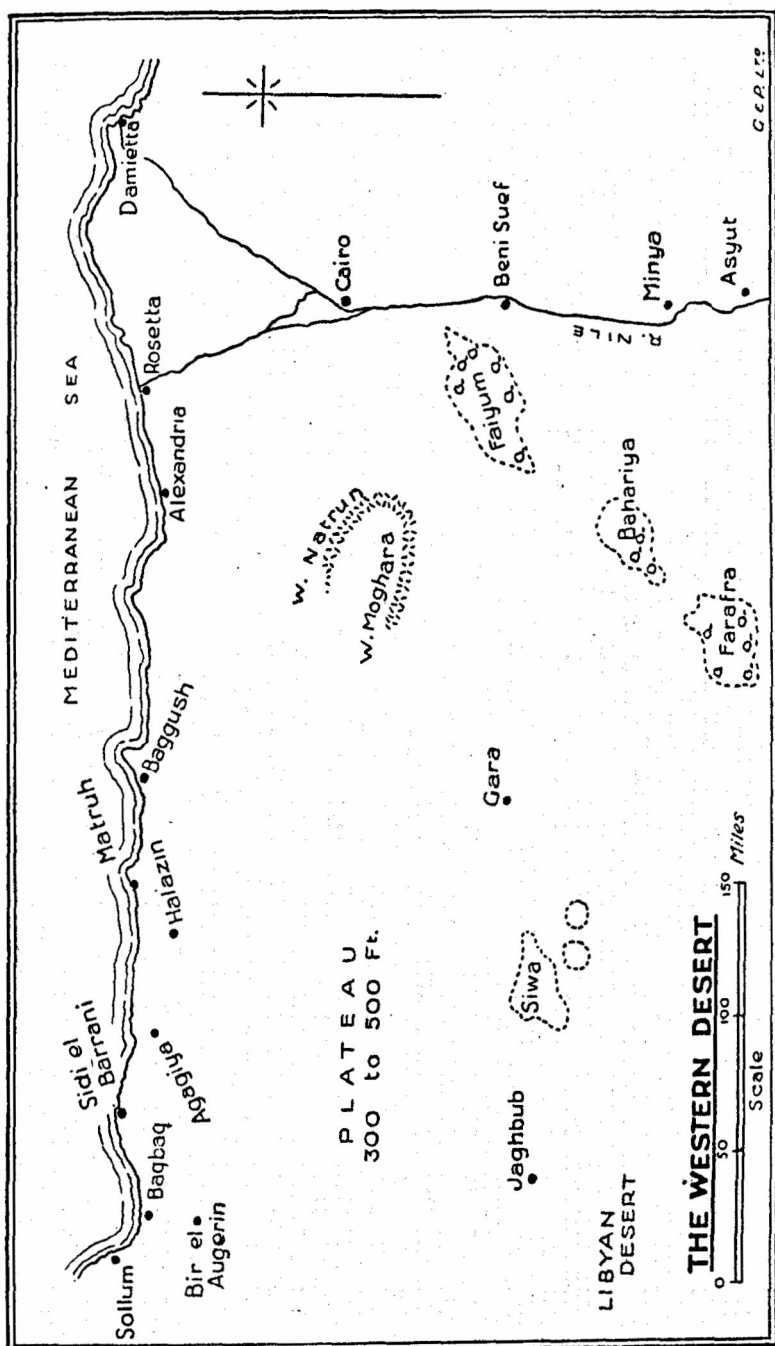
The reserves reinforced the final assault, which was successful about 1400 hours. The cavalry by this time were well placed for exploiting this success to the full. The commander of the Dorset Yeomanry kept in touch with and out of sight of the retreating Senussi until they were in ground suitable

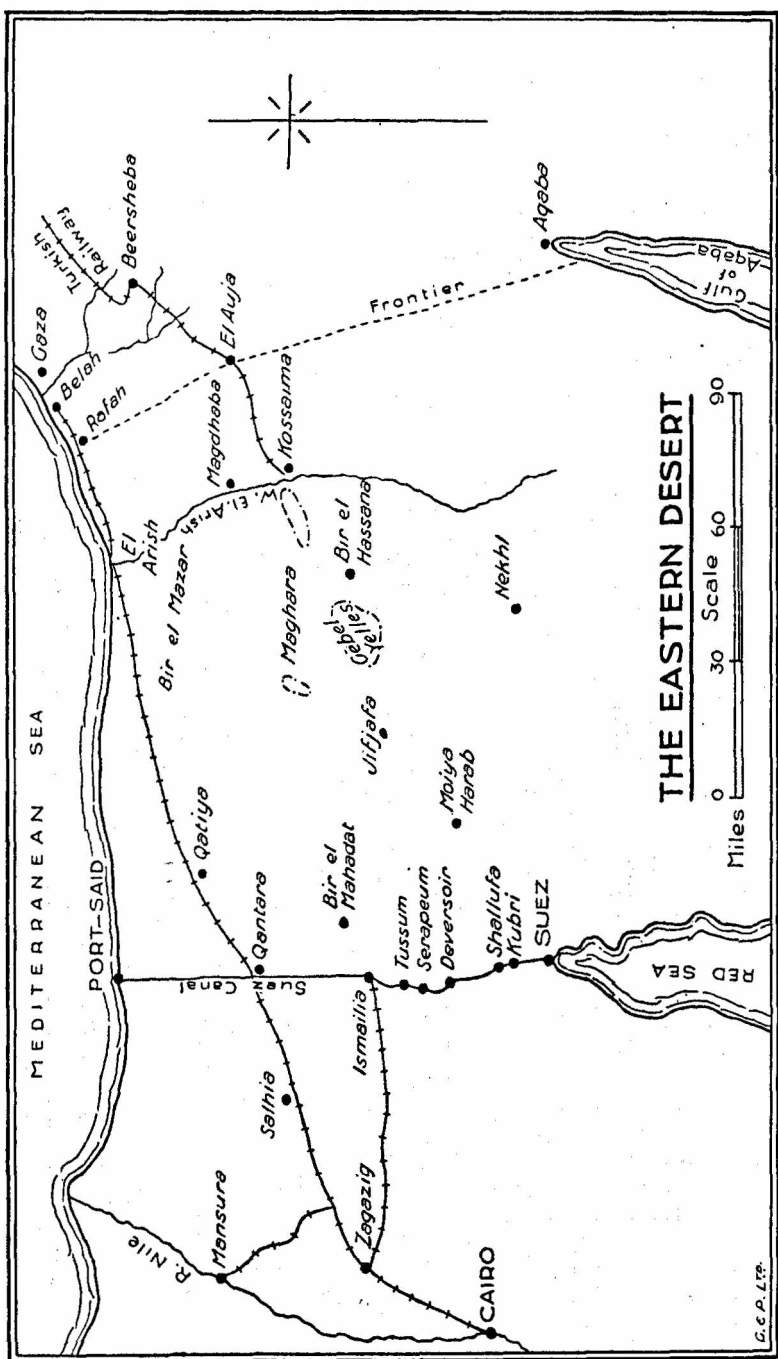
for cavalry action. Then he gave the order to charge. The enemy were completely surprised and routed. The Dorsets' machine-gun section, by close support and accurate fire, added to their confusion and casualties.

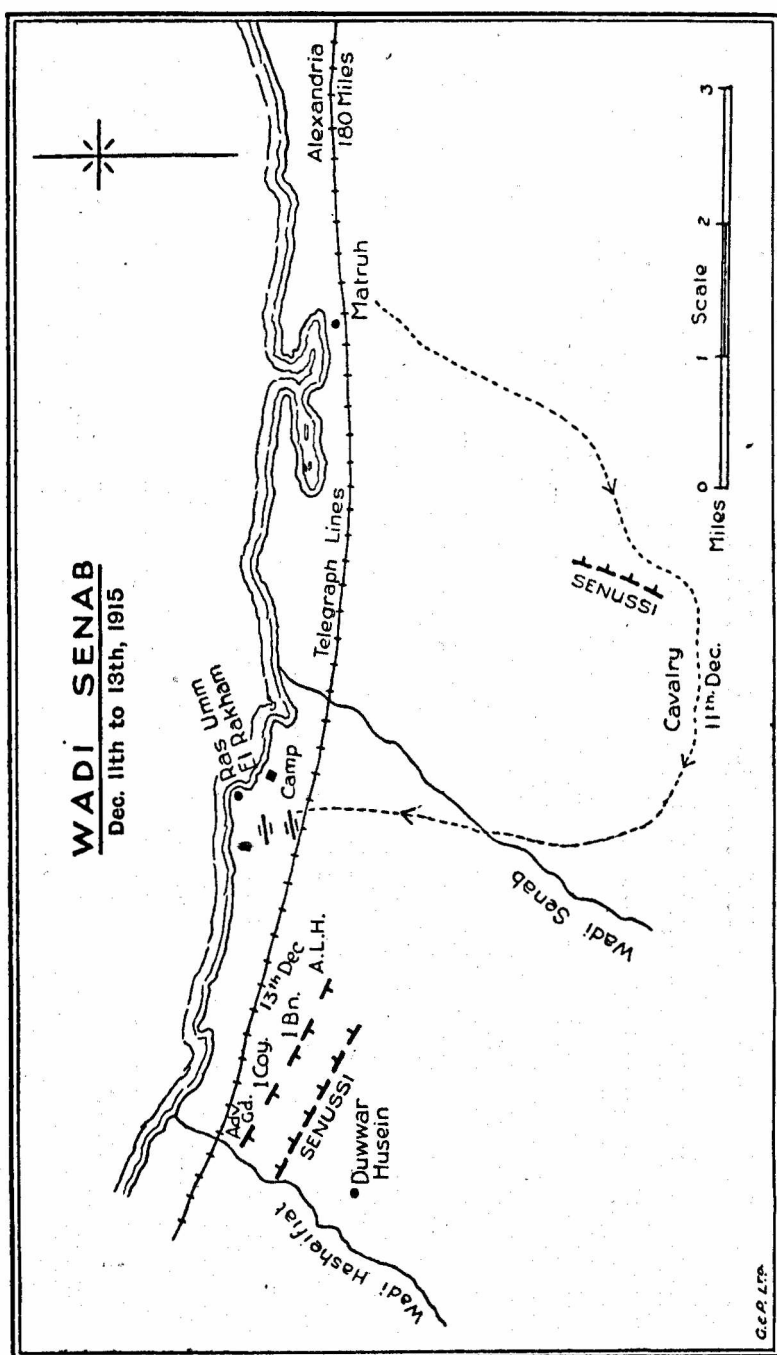
This was the last important battle that the Senussi were able to fight as an organized force.

## APPENDIX

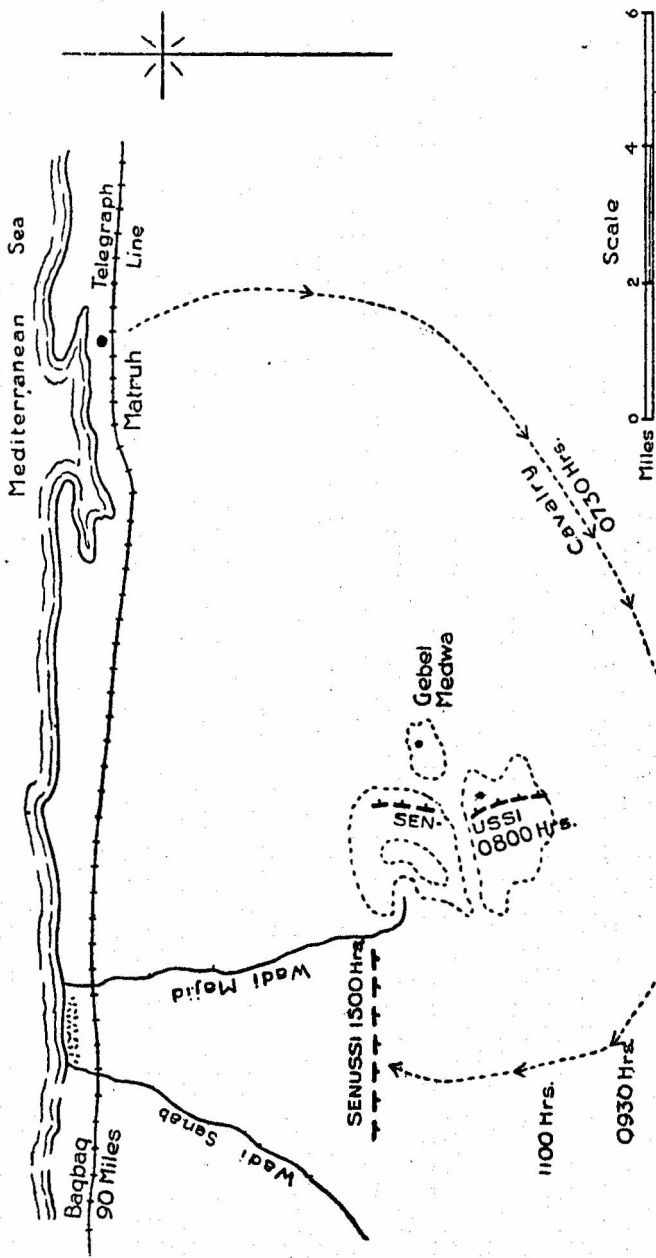






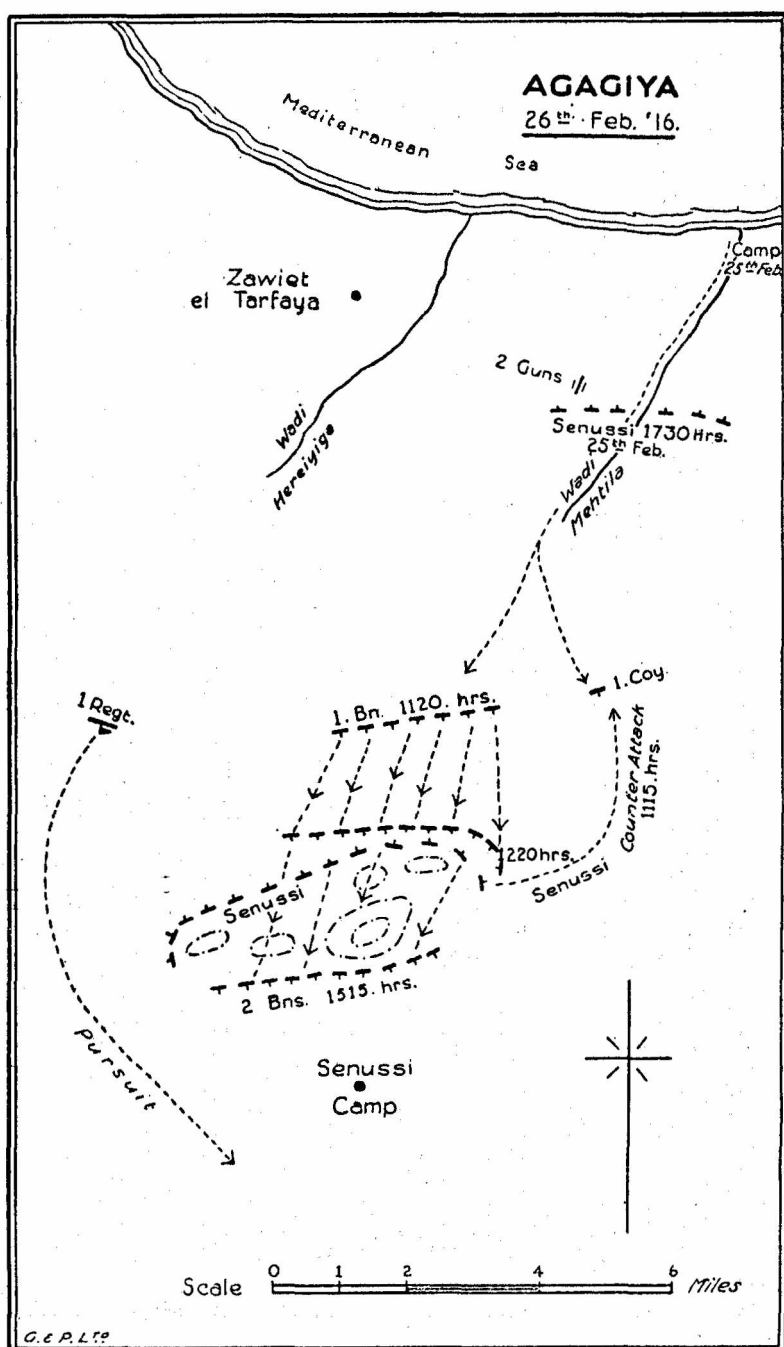


**WADI MAJID 25<sup>TH</sup> Dec.'15.**



**G.C.P. LTD.**

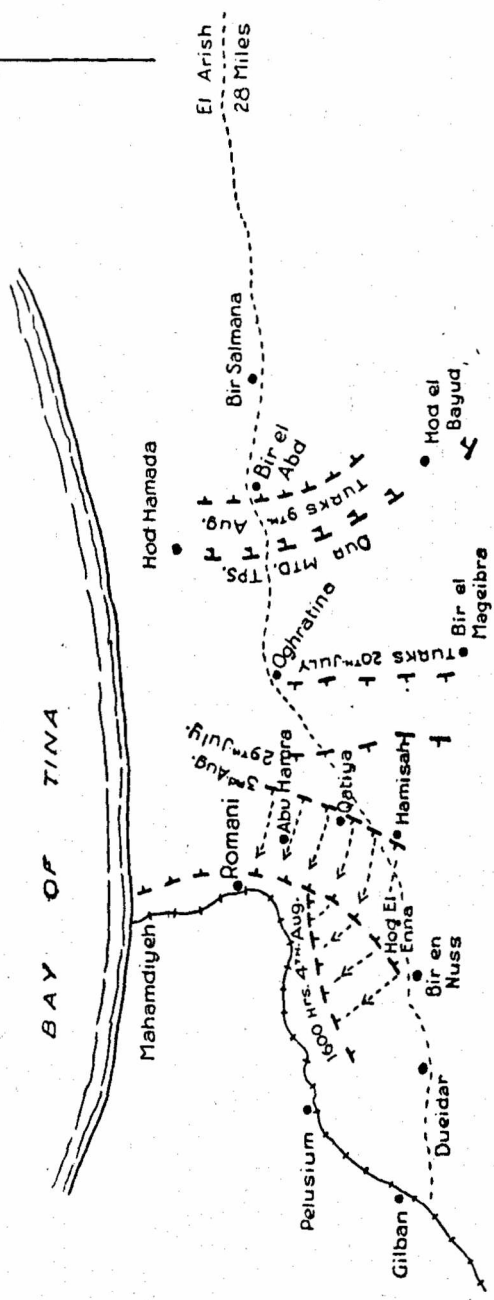
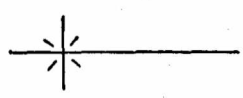




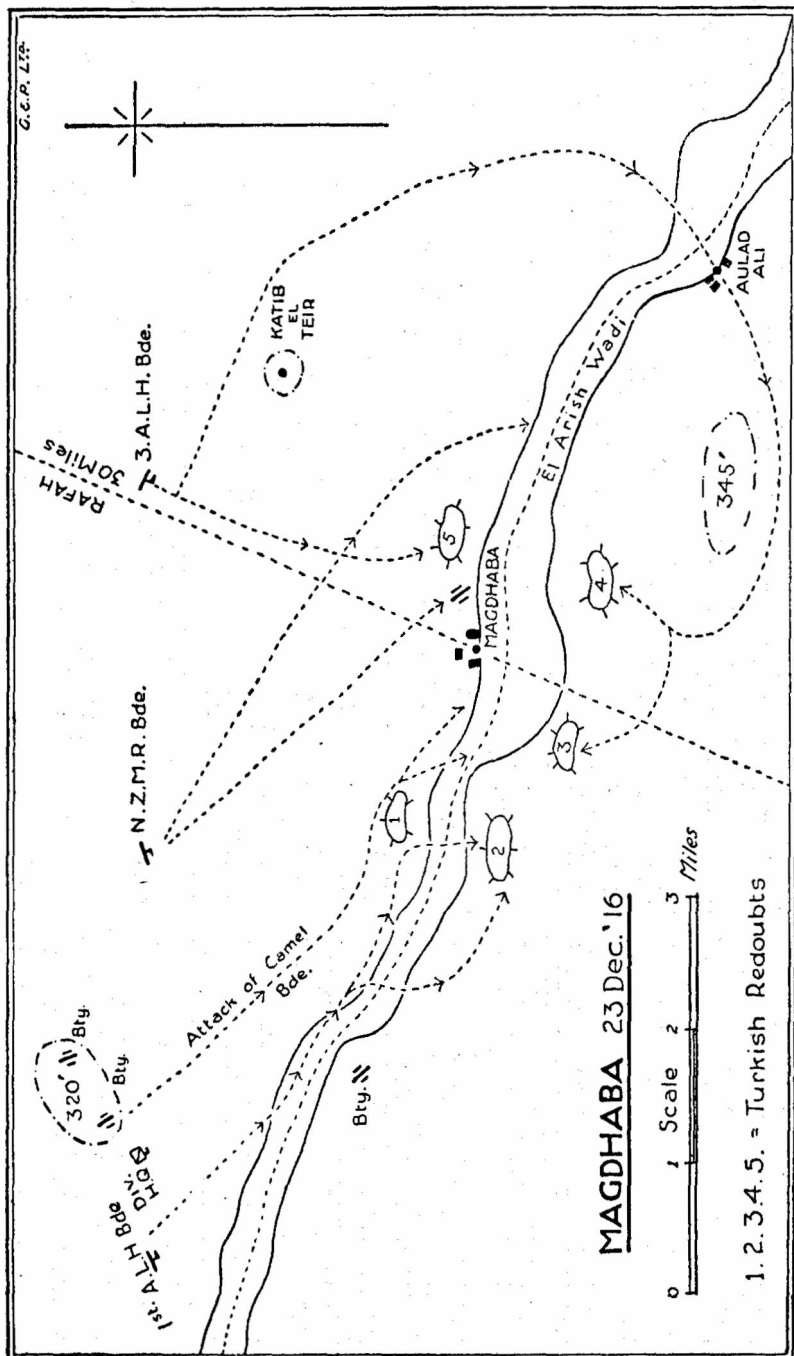
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4th August, 1916

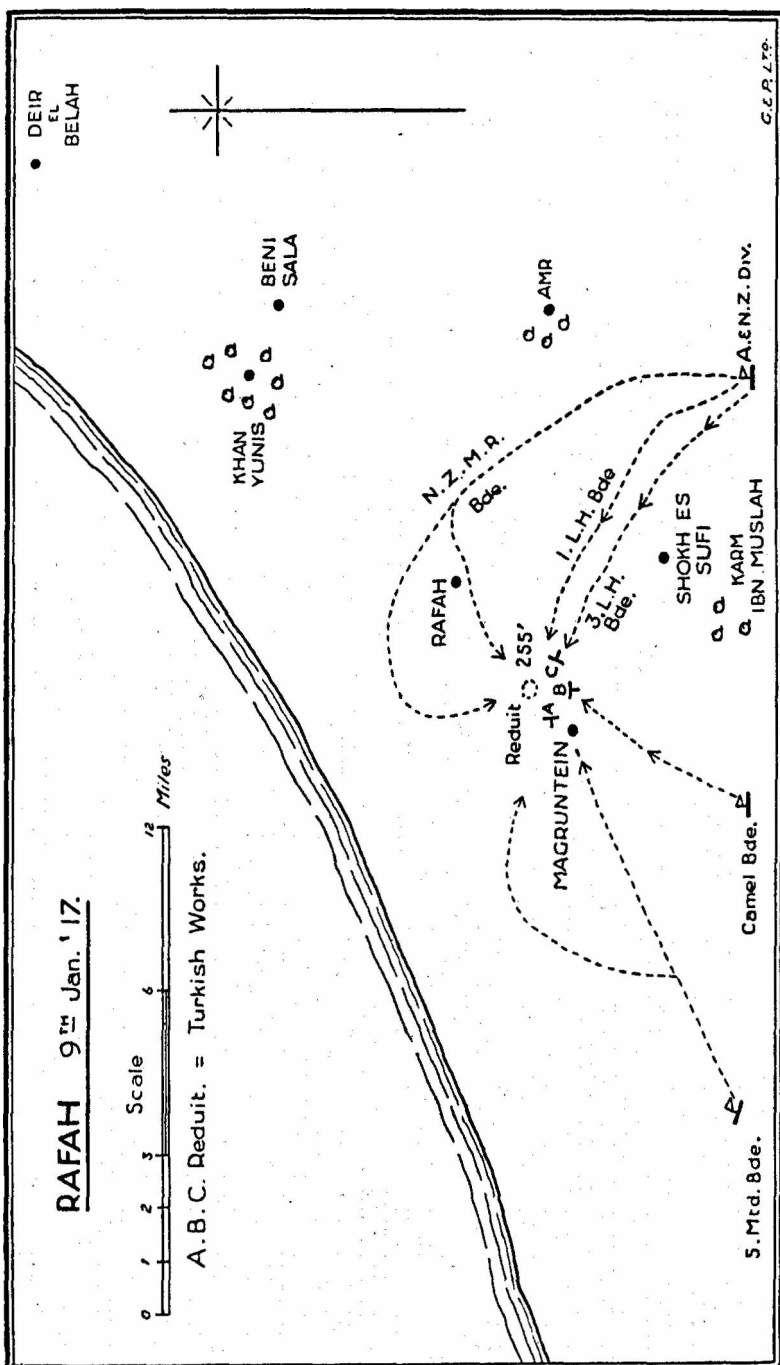
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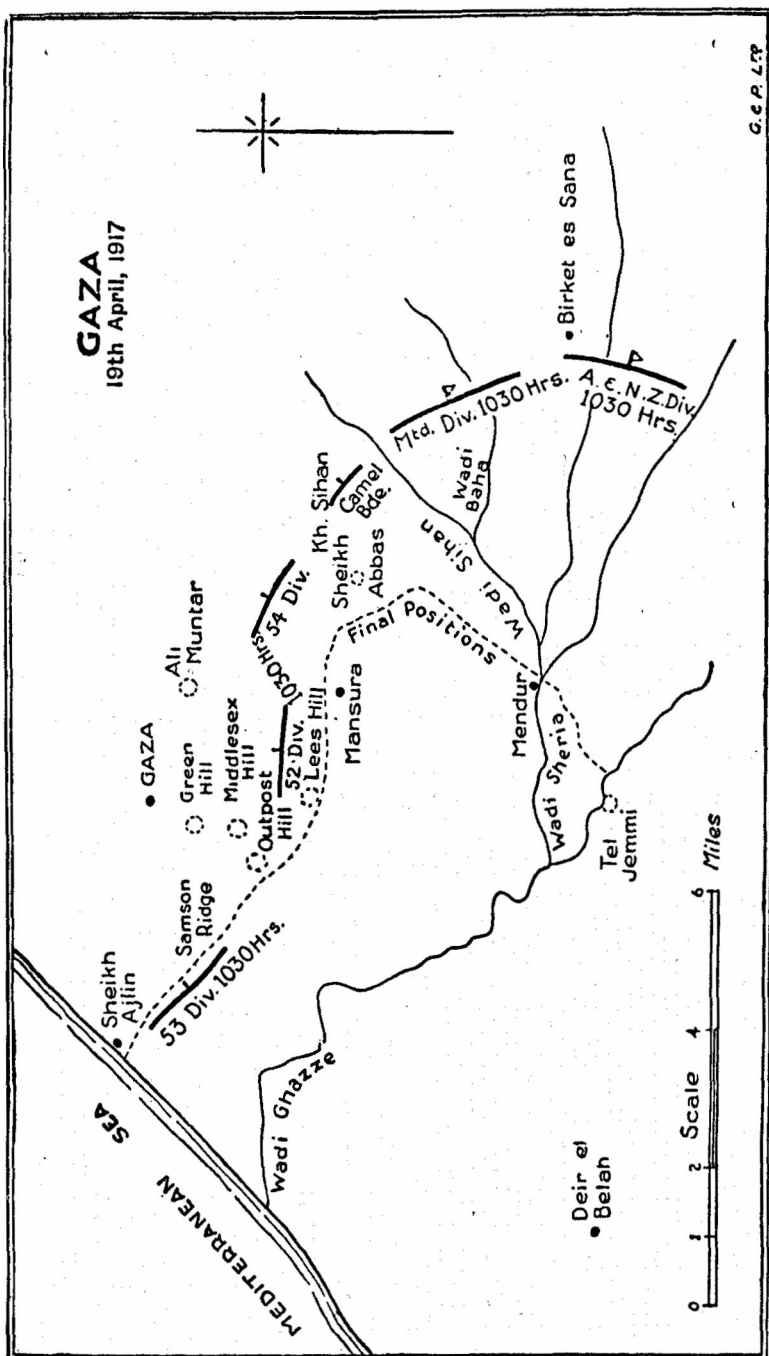




GAZA  
26<sup>th</sup> March. 1917

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